

**THE MINER AT  
HOME  
& OTHER STORIES**

*OF D. H. LAWRENCE*

**J. Harrison**

## CONTENTS

1. THE MINER AT HOME .....	5
2. ADOLF .....	11
3. REX .....	21
4. A PRELUDE .....	32
5. LESSFORD'S RABBITS .....	45
6. A LESSON ON A TORTOISE .....	53
7. THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT .....	60
8. MERCURY .....	67
9. THE MAN WHO WAS THROUGH WITH THE WORLD .....	73
10. THE WILFUL WOMAN .....	79
11. THE FLYING FISH .....	86
12. DELILAH AND MR. BIRCUM SHAW .....	112
13. A DREAM OF LIFE .....	123
14. THE UNDYING MAN .....	150
15. LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS .....	155
16. THE THIMBLE .....	196
17. THE MORTAL COIL .....	210

## *The Miner at Home*

LIKE most colliers, Bower had his dinner before he washed himself. It did not surprise his wife that he said little. He seemed quite amiable, but evidently did not feel confidential. Gertie was busy with the three children, the youngest of whom lay kicking on the sofa, preparing to squeal; therefore she did not concern herself overmuch with her husband, once having ascertained by a few shrewd glances at his heavy brows and his blue eyes, which moved conspicuously in his black face, that he was only pondering.

He smoked a solemn pipe until six o'clock. Although he was really a good husband, he did not notice that Gertie was tired. She was irritable at the end of the long day.

'Don't you want to wash yourself?' she asked, grudgingly, at six o'clock. It was sickening to have a man sitting there in his pit-dirt, never saying a word, smoking like a Red Indian.

'I'm ready, when you are,' he replied.

She lay the baby on the sofa, barricaded it with pillows, and brought from the scullery a great panchion, a bowl of heavy earthenware like brick, glazed inside to a dark mahogany colour. Tall and thin and very pale, she stood before the fire holding the great bowl, her grey eyes flashing.

'Get up, our Jack, this minute, or I'll squash thee under the blessed panchion.'

The fat boy of six, who was rolling on the rug in the firelight, said broadly:

'Squash me, then.'

'Get up,' she cried, giving him a push with her foot.

'Gi'e ower,' he said, rolling jollily.

'I'll smack you,' she said grimly, preparing to put down the panchion.

'Get up, theer,' shouted the father.

Gertie ladled water from the boiler with a tin ladling can. Drops fell from her ladle hissing into the red fire, splashing on to the white hearth, blazing like drops of flame on the flat-topped fender. The father gazed at it all, unmoved.

'I've told you,' he said, 'to put cold water in the panchion first. If one o' th' children goes an' falls in . . .'

'You can see as 'e doesn't then,' snapped she. She tempered the bowl with cold water, dropped in a flannel and a lump of soap, and spread the towel over the fender to warm.

Then, and only then, Bower rose. He wore no coat, and his arms were freckled black. He stripped to the waist, hitched his trousers into the strap, and knelt on the rug to wash himself. There was a great splashing and sputtering. The red firelight shone on his cap of white soap, and on the muscles of his back, on the strange working of his red and white muscular arms, that flashed up and down like individual creatures.

Gertie sat with the baby clawing at her ears and hair and nose. Continually she drew back her face and head from the cruel little baby-clasp. Jack was hanging on to the kitchen door.

'Come away from that door,' cried the mother.

Jack did not come away, but neither did he open the door and run the risk of incurring his father's wrath. The room was very hot, but the thought of a draught is abhorrent to a miner.

With the baby on one arm, Gertie washed her husband's back. She sponged it carefully with the flannel, and then, still with one hand, began to dry it on the rough towel.



## THE MINER AT HOME

'Canna ter put th' childt down an' use both hands?' said her husband.

'Yes; an' then if th' childt screets, there's a bigger to-do than iver. There's no suitin' some folk.'

'The childt 'ud non screet.'

Gertie plumped it down. The baby began to cry. The wife rubbed her husband's back till it grew pink, while Bower quivered with pleasure. As soon as she threw the towel down:

'Shut that childt up,' he said.

He wrestled his way into his shirt. His head emerged, with black hair standing roughly on end. He was rather an ugly man, just above medium height, and stiffly built. He had a thin black moustache over a full mouth, and a very full chin that was marred by a blue seam, where a horse had kicked him when he was a lad in the pit.

With both hands on the mantelpiece above his head, he stood looking in the fire, his whitish shirt hanging like a smock over his pit trousers.

Presently, still looking absently in the fire, he said: 'Bill Andrews was standin' at th' pit top, an' give ivery man as 'e come up one o' these.'

He handed to his wife a small whity-blue paper, on which was printed simply:

February 14, 1912.

To the Manager -

I hereby give notice to leave your employment fourteen days from above date.

Signed —

Gertie read the paper, blindly dodging her head from the baby's grasp.

'An' what d'you reckon that's for?' she asked.

'I suppose it means as we come out.'

'I'm sure!' she cried in indignation. 'Well, *tha'*rt not goin' to sign it.'

'It'll ma'e no diff'rence whether I do or dunna - t'others will.'

'Then let 'em!' She made a small clicking sound in her mouth. 'This 'll ma'e th' third strike as we've had sin' we've been married; an' a fat lot th' better for it you are, arena you?'

He squirmed uneasily.

'No, but we mean to be,' he said.

'I'll tell you what, colliers is a discontented lot, as doesn't know what they *do* want. That's what they are.'

'Tha'd better not let some o' th' colliers as there is hear thee say so.'

'I don't care who hears me. An' there isn't a man in Eastwood but what'll say as th' last two strikes has ruined the place. There's that much bad blood now atween th' mesters an' th' men as there isn't a thing but what's askew. An' what *will* it be, I should like to know!'

'It's not on'y here; it's all ower th' country alike,' he gloated.

'Yes; it's them blessed Yorkshire an' Welsh colliers as does it. They're that bug nowadays, what wi' talkin' an' spoutin', they hardly know which side their back-side hangs. Here, take this childt!'

She thrust the baby into his arms, carried out the heavy bowlful of black suds, mended the fire, cleared round, and returned for the child.

'Ben Haseldine said, an' he's a union man - he told me when he come for th' union money yesterday, as th' men doesn't want to come out - not our men. It's th' union.'

'Tha knows nowt about it, woman. It's a' woman's jabber, from beginnin' to end.'

'You don't intend us to know. Who wants th' Minimum Wage? Butties doesn't. There th' butties'll be, havin' to pay seven shillin' a day to men as 'appen isn't worth a penny more than five.'

## THE MINER AT HOME

'But the butties is goin' to have eight shillin' accordin' to scale.'

'An' then th' men as can't work tip-top, an' is worth, 'appen, five shillin' a day, they get th' sack: an' th' old men, an' so on.'

'Nowt o' th' sort, woman, nowt o' th' sort. Tha's got it off 'am-pat. There's goin' to be inspectors for all that, an' th' men'll get what they're worth, accordin' to age, an' so on.'

'An' accordin' to idleness an' – what somebody says about 'em. I'll back! There'll be a lot o' fairness!'

'Tha talks like a woman as knows nowt. What does thee know about it?'

'I know what you did at th' last strike. And I know this much, when Shipley men had *their* strike tickets, not one in three signed 'em – so there. An' *tha'*rt not goin' to!'

'We want a livin' wage,' he declared.

'Hanna you got one?' she cried.

'Han we?' he shouted. 'Han we? Who does more chaunterin' than thee when it's a short wik, an' tha gets 'appen a scroddy twenty-two shillin'? Tha goes at me 'ard enough.'

'Yi; but what better shall you be? What better *are* you for th' last two strikes – tell me that?'

'I'll tell thee this much, th' mesters doesna' mean us to ha'e owt. They promise, but they dunna keep it, not they. Up comes Friday night, an' nowt to draw, an' a woman fit to ha'e yer guts out for it.'

'It's nowt but th' day-men as wants the blessed Minimum Wage – it's not butties.'

'It's time as th' butties *did* ha'e ter let their men make a fair day's wage. Four an' sixpence a day is about as 'e's allowed to addle, whoever he may be.'

'I wonder what you'll say next. You say owt as is put in your mouth, that's a fac'. What are thee, dost

reckon? – are ter a butty, or day-man, or ostler, or are ter a mester? – for tha might be, ter hear thee talk.’

‘I nedna neither. It ought to be fair a’ round.’

‘It ought, hang my rags, it ought! Tha’rt very fair to me, for instance.’

‘An’ arena I?’

‘Tha thinks ’cause tha gi’es me a lousy thirty shillin’ reg’lar th’art th’ best man i’ th’ Almighty world. Tha mun be waited on han’ an’ foot, an’ sided wi’ whatever tha says. But I’m *not*! No, an’ I’m not, not when it comes to strikes. I’ve seen enough on ’em.’

‘Then niver open thy mouth again if it’s a short wik, an’ we’re pinched.’

‘We’re niver pinched that much. An’ a short wik isn’t no shorter than a strike wik; put that i’ thy pipe an’ smoke it. It’s th’ idle men as wants th’ strikes.’

‘Shut thy mouth, woman. If every man worked as hard as I do . . .’

‘He wouldn’t ha’e as much to do as me; an’ ’e wouldna. But *I’ve* nowt to do, as tha’rt flig ter tell me. No, it’s th’ idle men as wants th’ strike. It’s a union strike, this is, not a men’s strike. You’re sharpenin’ th’ knife for your own throats.’

‘Am I not sick of a woman as listens to every tale as is poured into her ears? No, I’m not takin’ th’ kid. I’m goin’ out.’

He put on his boots determinedly.

She rocked herself with vexation and weariness.

## *Adolf*

WHEN we were children our father often worked on the night-shift. Once it was spring-time, and he used to arrive home, black and tired, just as we were downstairs in our nightdresses. Then night met morning face to face, and the contact was not always happy. Perhaps it was painful to my father to see us gaily entering upon the day into which he dragged himself soiled and weary. He didn't like going to bed in the spring morning sunshine.

But sometimes he was happy, because of his long walk through the dewy fields in the first daybreak. He loved the open morning, the crystal and the space, after a night down pit. He watched every bird, every stir in the trembling grass, answered the whinnying of the peewits and tweeted to the wrens. If he could, he also would have whinnied and tweeted and whistled in a native language that was not human. He liked non-human things best.

One sunny morning we were all sitting at table when we heard his heavy slurring walk up the entry. We became uneasy. His was always a disturbing presence, trammelling. He passed the window darkly, and we heard him go into the scullery and put down his tin bottle. But directly he came into the kitchen. We felt at once that he had something to communicate. No one spoke. We watched his black face for a second.

'Give me a drink,' he said.

My mother hastily poured out his tea. He went to pour it out into his saucer. But instead of drinking he suddenly put something on the table among the teacups. A tiny brown rabbit! A small rabbit, a mere morsel, sitting against the bread as still as if it were a made thing.

'A rabbit! A young one! Who gave it you, Father?'

But he laughed enigmatically, with a sliding motion of his yellow-grey eyes, and went to take off his coat. We pounced on the rabbit.

‘Is it alive? Can you feel its heart beat?’

My father came back and sat down heavily in his arm-chair. He dragged his saucer to him, and blew his tea, pushing out his red lips under his black moustache.

‘Where did you get it, Father?’

‘I picked it up,’ he said, wiping his naked forearm over his mouth and beard.

‘Where?’

‘It is a wild one!’ came my mother’s quick voice.

‘Yes, it is.’

‘Then why did you bring it?’ cried my mother

‘Oh, we wanted it,’ came our cry.

‘Yes, I’ve no doubt you did –’ retorted my mother. But she was drowned in our clamour of questions.

On the field path my father had found a dead mother rabbit and three dead little ones – this one alive, but unmoving.

‘But what had killed them, Daddy?’

‘I couldn’t say, my child. I s’d think she’d aten something.’

‘Why did you bring it!’ again my mother’s voice of condemnation. ‘You know what it will be.’

My father made no answer, but we were loud in protest.

‘He must bring it. It’s not big enough to live by itself. It would die,’ we shouted.

‘Yes, and it will die now. And then there’ll be *another* outcry.’

My mother set her face against the tragedy of dead pets. Our hearts sank.

‘It won’t die, Father, will it? Why will it? It won’t.’

‘I s’d think not,’ said my father.

## ADOLF

'You know well enough it will. Haven't we had it all before!' said my mother.

'They dunna always pine,' replied my father testily.

But my mother reminded him of other little wild animals he had brought, which had sulked and refused to live, and brought storms of tears and trouble in our house of lunatics.

Trouble fell on us. The little rabbit sat on our lap, unmoving, its eye wide and dark. We brought it milk; warm milk, and held it to its nose. It sat as still as if it was far away, retreated down some deep burrow, hidden, oblivious. We wetted its mouth and whiskers with drops of milk. It gave no sign, did not even shake off the wet white drops. Somebody began to shed a few secret tears.

'What did I say?' cried my mother. 'Take it and put it down in the field.'

Her command was in vain. We were driven to get dressed for school. There sat the rabbit. It was like a tiny obscure cloud. Watching it, the emotions died out of our breast. Useless to love it, to yearn over it. Its little feelings were all ambushed. They must be circumvented. Love and affection were a trespass upon it. A little wild thing, it became more mute and asphyxiated still in its own arrest, when we approached with love. We must not love it. We must circumvent it, for its own existence.

So I passed the order to my sister and my mother. The rabbit was not to be spoken to, nor even looked at. Wrapping it in a piece of flannel I put it in an obscure corner of the cold parlour, and put a saucer of milk before its nose. My mother was forbidden to enter the parlour while we were at school.

'As if I should take any notice of your nonsense,' she cried affronted. Yet I doubt if she ventured into the parlour.

At midday, after school, creeping into the front room, there we saw the rabbit still and unmoving in the piece of flannel. Strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living! It was a sore problem to us.

'Why won't it drink its milk, Mother?' we whispered. Our father was asleep.

'It prefers to sulk its life away, silly little thing.' A profound problem. Prefers to sulk its life away! We put young dandelion leaves to its nose. The sphinx was not more oblivious. Yet its eye was bright.

At tea-time, however, it had hopped a few inches, out of its flannel, and there it sat again, uncovered, a little solid cloud of muteness, brown, with unmoving whiskers. Only its side palpitated slightly with life.

Darkness came; my father set off to work. The rabbit was still unmoving. Dumb despair was coming over the sisters, a threat of tears before bed-time. Clouds of my mother's anger gathered as she muttered against my father's wantonness.

Once more the rabbit was wrapped in the old pit-singlet. But now it was carried into the scullery and put under the copper fire-place, that it might imagine itself inside a burrow. The saucers were placed about, four or five, here and there on the floor, so that if the little creature *should* chance to hop abroad, it could not fail to come upon some food. After this my mother was allowed to take from the scullery what she wanted and then she was forbidden to open the door.

When morning came and it was light, I went downstairs. Opening the scullery door, I heard a slight scuffle. Then I saw dabbles of milk all over the floor and tiny rabbit-droppings in the saucers. And there the miscreant, the tips of his ears showing behind a pair of boots. I peeped at him. He sat bright-eyed and askance, twitching his nose and looking at me while not looking at me.



## ADOLF

He was alive – very much alive. But still we were afraid to trespass much on his confidence.

‘Father!’ My father was arrested at the door. ‘Father, the rabbit’s alive.’

‘Back your life it is,’ said my father.

‘Mind how you go in.’

By evening, however, the little creature was tame, quite tame. He was christened Adolf. We were enchanted by him. We couldn’t really love him, because he was wild and loveless to the end. But he was an unmixed delight.

We decided he was too small to live in a hutch – he must live at large in the house. My mother protested, but in vain. He was so tiny. So we had him upstairs, and he dropped his tiny pills on the bed and we were enchanted.

Adolf made himself instantly at home. He had the run of the house, and was perfectly happy, with his tunnels and his holes behind the furniture.

We loved him to take meals with us. He would sit on the table humping his back, sipping his milk, shaking his whiskers and his tender ears, hopping off and hobbling back to his saucer, with an air of supreme unconcern. Suddenly he was alert. He hobbled a few tiny paces, and reared himself up inquisitively at the sugar basin. He fluttered his tiny fore-paws, and then reached and laid them on the edge of the basin, while he craned his thin neck and peeped in. He trembled his whiskers at the sugar, then did his best to lift down a lump.

‘Do you think I will have it! Animals in the sugar pot!’ cried my mother, with a rap of her hand on the table.

Which so delighted the electric Adolf that he flung his hind-quarters and knocked over a cup.

‘It’s your own fault, Mother. If you left him alone –’

He continued to take tea with us. He rather liked warm tea. And he loved sugar. Having nibbled a lump, he would turn to the butter. There he was shooed off by our parent.

He soon learned to treat her shooing with indifference. Still, she hated him to put his nose in the food. And he loved to do it. And one day between them they overturned the cream-jug. Adolf deluged his little chest, bounced back in terror, was seized by his little ears by my mother and bounced down on the hearth-rug. There he shivered in momentary discomfort, and suddenly set off in a wild flight to the parlour.

This last was his happy hunting ground. He had cultivated the bad habit of pensively nibbling certain bits of cloth in the hearth-rug. When chased from this pasture he would retreat under the sofa. There he would twinkle in Buddhist meditation until suddenly, no one knew why, he would go off like an alarm clock. With a sudden bumping scuffle he would whirl out of the room, going through the doorway with his little ears flying. Then we would hear his thunderbolt hurtling in the parlour, but before we could follow, the wild streak of Adolf would flash past us, on an electric wind that swept him round the scullery and carried him back, a little mad thing, flying possessed like a ball round the parlour. After which ebullition he would sit in a corner composed and distant, twitching his whiskers in abstract meditation. And it was in vain we questioned him about his outbursts. He just went off like a gun, and was as calm after it as a gun that smokes placidly.

Alas, he grew up rapidly. It was almost impossible to keep him from the outer door.

One day, as we were playing by the stile, I saw his brown shadow loiter across the road and pass into the field that faced the houses. Instantly a cry of 'Adolf!' – a cry he knew full well. And instantly a wind swept him away down the sloping meadow, his tail twinkling and zig-zagging through the grass. After him we pelted. It was a strange sight to see him, ears back, his little loins so

powerful, flinging the world behind him. We ran ourselves out of breath, but could not catch him. Then somebody headed him off, and he sat with sudden unconcern, twitching his nose under a bunch of nettles.

His wanderings cost him a shock. One Sunday morning my father had just been quarrelling with a pedlar, and we were hearing the aftermath indoors, when there came a sudden unearthly scream from the yard. We flew out. There sat Adolf cowering under a bench, while a great black and white cat glowered intently at him, a few yards away. Sight not to be forgotten. Adolf rolling back his eyes and parting his strange muzzle in another scream, the cat stretching forward in a slow elongation.

Ha, how we hated that cat! How we pursued him over the chapel wall and across the neighbours' gardens.

Adolf was still only half grown.

'Cats!' said my mother. 'Hideous detestable animals, why do people harbour them?'

But Adolf was becoming too much for her. He dropped too many pills. And suddenly to hear him clumping downstairs when she was alone in the house was startling. And to keep him from the door was impossible. Cats prowled outside. It was worse than having a child to look after.

Yet we would not have him shut up. He became more lusty, more callous than ever. He was a strong kicker, and many a scratch on face and arms did we owe to him. But he brought his own doom on himself. The lace curtains in the parlour – my mother was rather proud of them – fell on the floor very full. One of Adolf's joys was to scuffle wildly through them as though through some foamy undergrowth. He had already torn rents in them.

One day he entangled himself altogether. He kicked, he whirled round in a mad nebulous inferno. He screamed – and brought down the curtain-rod with a smash, right on

the best beloved pelargonium, just as my mother rushed in. She extricated him, but she never forgave him. And he never forgave either. A heartless wildness had come over him.

Even we understood that he must go. It was decided, after a long deliberation, that my father should carry him back to the wild-woods. Once again he was stowed into the great pocket of the pit-jacket.

'Best pop him i' th' pot,' said my father, who enjoyed raising the wind of indignation.

And so, next day, our father said that Adolf, set down on the edge of the coppice, had hopped away with utmost indifference, neither elated nor moved. We heard it and believed. But many, many were the heartsearchings. How would the other rabbits receive him? Would they smell his tameness, his humanized degradation, and rend him? My mother pooh-poohed the extravagant idea.

However, he was gone, and we were rather relieved. My father kept an eye open for him. He declared that several times passing the coppice in the early morning, he had seen Adolf peeping through the nettle-stalks. He had called him, in an odd, high-voiced, cajoling fashion. But Adolf had not responded. Wildness gains so soon upon its creatures. And they become so contemptuous then of our tame presence. So it seemed to me. I myself would go to the edge of the coppice, and call softly. I myself would imagine bright eyes between the nettle-stalks, flash of a white, scornful tail past the bracken. That insolent white tail, as Adolf turned his flank on us! It reminded me always of a certain rude gesture, and a certain unprintable phrase, which may not even be suggested.

But when naturalists discuss the meaning of the rabbit's white tail, that rude gesture and still ruder phrase always come to my mind. Naturalists say that the rabbit shows his white tail in order to guide his young safely after him,

ling charges to follow on. How nice and naïve! I only know that my Adolf wasn't naïve. He used to whisk his flank at me, push his white feather in my eye, and say '*Merde!*' It's a rude word – but one which Adolf was always semaphoring at me, flag-wagging it with all the derision of his narrow haunches.

That's a rabbit all over – insolence, and the white flag of spiteful derision. Yes, and he keeps his flag flying to the bitter end, sporting, insolent little devil that he is. See him running for his life. Oh, how his soul is fanned to an ecstasy of fright, a fugitive whirl-wind of panic. Gone mad, he throws the world behind him, with astonishing hind legs. He puts back his head and lays his ears on his sides and rolls the white of his eyes in sheer ecstatic agony of speed. He knows the awful approach behind him; bullet or stoat. He knows! He knows, his eyes are turned back almost into his head. It is agony. But it is also ecstasy. Ecstasy! See the insolent white flag bobbing. He whirls on the magic wind of terror. All his pent-up soul rushes into agonized electric emotion of fear. He flings himself on, like a falling star swooping into extinction. White heat of the agony of fear. And at the same time, bob! bob! bob! goes the white tail, *merde! merde! merde!* it says to the pursuer. The rabbit can't help it. In his utmost extremity he still flings the insult at the pursuer. He is the unconquerable fugitive, the indomitable meek. No wonder the stoat becomes vindictive.

And if he escapes, this precious rabbit! Don't you see him sitting there, in his earthly nook, a little ball of silence and rabbit triumph? Don't you see the glint on his black eye? Don't you see, in his very immobility, how the whole world is *merde* to him? No conceit like the conceit of the meek. And if the avenging angel in the shape of the ghostly ferret steals down on him, there comes a shriek of

terror out of that little hump of self-satisfaction sitting motionless in a corner. Falls the fugitive. But even fallen, his white feather floats. Even in death it seems to say: 'I am the meek, I am the righteous, I am the rabbit. All you rest, you are evil doers, and you shall be *bien emmerdés!*'

## *Rex*

SINCE every family has its black sheep, it almost follows that every man must have a sooty uncle. Lucky if he hasn't two. However, it is only with my mother's brother that we are concerned. She had loved him dearly when he was a little blond boy. When he grew up black, she was always vowing she would never speak to him again. Yet when he put in an appearance, after years of absence, she invariably received him in a festive mood, and was even flirty with him.

He rolled up one day in a dog-cart, when I was a small boy. He was large and bullet-headed and blustering, and this time, sporty. Sometimes he was rather literary, sometimes coloured with business. But this time he was in checks, and was sporty. We viewed him from a distance.

The upshot was, would we rear a pup for him. Now my mother detested animals about the house. She could not bear the mix-up of human with animal life. Yet she consented to bring up the pup.

My uncle had taken a large, vulgar public-house in a large and vulgar town. It came to pass that I must fetch the pup. Strange for me, a member of the Band of Hope, to enter the big, noisy, smelly plate-glass and mahogany public-house. It was called *The Good Omen*. Strange to have my uncle towering over me in the passage, shouting 'Hello, Johnny, what d'yer want?' He didn't know me. Strange to think he was my mother's brother, and that he had his bouts when he read Browning aloud with emotion and éclat.

I was given tea in a narrow, uncomfortable sort of living-room, half kitchen. Curious that such a palatial pub should show such miserable private accommodations, but

so it was. There was I, unhappy, and glad to escape with the soft fat pup. It was winter-time, and I wore a big-flapped black overcoat, half cloak. Under the cloak-sleeves I hid the puppy, who trembled. It was Saturday, and the train was crowded, and he whimpered under my coat. I sat in mortal fear of being hauled out for travelling without a dog-ticket. However, we arrived, and my torments were for nothing.

The others were wildly excited over the puppy. He was small and fat and white, with a brown-and-black head: a fox terrier. My father said he had a lemon head – some such mysterious technical phraseology. It wasn't lemon at all, but coloured like a field bee. And he had a black spot at the root of his spine.

It was Saturday night – bath-night. He crawled on the hearth-rug like a fat white teacup, and licked the bare toes that had just been bathed.

'He ought to be called Spot,' said one. But that was too ordinary. It was a great question, what to call him.

'Call him Rex – the King,' said my mother, looking down on the fat, animated little teacup, who was chewing my sister's little toe and making her squeal with joy and tickles. We took the name in all seriousness.

'Rex – the King!' We thought it was just right. Not for years did I realize that it was a sarcasm on my mother's part. She must have wasted some twenty years or more of irony on our incurable naïveté.

It wasn't a successful name, really. Because my father and all the people in the street failed completely to pronounce the monosyllable Rex. They all said Rax. And it always distressed me. It always suggested to me seaweed, and rack-and-ruin. Poor Rex!

We loved him dearly. The first night we woke to hear him weeping and whinnying in loneliness at the foot of



the stairs. When it could be borne no more, I slipped down for him, and he slept under the sheets.

'I won't have that little beast in the beds. Beds are not for dogs,' declared my mother callously.

'He's as good as we are!' we cried, injured.

'Whether he is or not, he's not going in the beds.'

I think now, my mother scorned us for our lack of pride. We were a little *infra dig*, we children.

The second night, however, Rex wept the same and in the same way was comforted. The third night we heard our father plod downstairs, heard several slaps administered to the yelling, dismayed puppy, and heard the amiable, but to us heartless voice saying 'Shut it then! Shut thy noise, 'st hear? Stop in thy basket, stop there!'

'It's a shame!' we shouted, in muffled rebellion, from the sheets.

'I'll give you shame, if you don't hold your noise and go to sleep,' called our mother from her room. Whereupon we shed angry tears and went to sleep. But there was a tension.

'Such a houseful of idiots would make me detest the little beast, even if he was better than he is,' said my mother.

But as a matter of fact, she did not detest Rexie at all. She only had to pretend to do so, to balance our adoration. And in truth, she did not care for close contact with animals. She was too fastidious. My father, however, would take on a real dog's voice, talking to the puppy: a funny, high, sing-song falsetto which he seemed to produce at the top of his head. 'S a pretty little dog! 's a pretty little doggy! - ay! - yes! - he is, yes! - Wag thy strunt, then! Wag thy strunt, Rexie! - Ha-ha! Nay, tha munna -' This last as the puppy, wild with excitement at the strange falsetto voice, licked my father's nostrils and bit my father's nose with his sharp little teeth.

'E makes blood come,' said my father.

'Serves you right for being so silly with him,' said my mother. It was odd to see her as she watched the man, my father, crouching and talking to the little dog and laughing strangely when the little creature bit his nose and toused his beard. What does a woman think of her husband at such a moment?

My mother amused herself over the names we called him.

'He's an angel - he's a little butterfly - Rexie, my sweet!'

'Sweet! A dirty little object!' interpolated my mother. She and he had a feud from the first. Of course he chewed boots and worried our stockings and swallowed our garters. The moment we took off our stockings he would dart away with one, we after him. Then as he hung, growling vociferously, at one end of the stocking, we at the other, we would cry:

'Look at him, Mother! He'll make holes in it again.' Whereupon my mother darted at him and spanked him sharply.

'Let go, sir, you destructive little fiend.'

But he didn't let go. He began to growl with real rage, and hung on viciously. Mite as he was, he defied her with a manly fury. He did not hate her, nor she him. But they had one long battle with one another.

'I'll teach you, my Jockey! Do you think I'm going to spend my life darning after your destructive little teeth! I'll show you if I will!'

But Rexie only growled more viciously. They both became really angry, while we children expostulated earnestly with both. He would not let her take the stocking from him.

'You should tell him properly, Mother. He won't be driven,' we said.

'I'll drive him farther than he bargains for. I'll drive him out of my sight for ever, that I will,' declared my mother, truly angry. He would put her into a real temper, with his tiny, growling defiance.

'He's sweet! A Rexie, a little Rexie!'

'A filthy little nuisance! Don't think I'll put up with him.'

And to tell the truth, he was dirty at first. How could he be otherwise, so young! But my mother hated him for it. And perhaps this was the real start of their hostility. For he lived in the house with us. He would wrinkle his nose and show his tiny dagger-teeth in fury when he was thwarted, and his growls of real battle-rage against my mother rejoiced us as much as they angered her. But at last she caught him *in flagrante*. She pounced on him, rubbed his nose in the mess, and flung him out into the yard. He yelped with shame and disgust and indignation. I shall never forget the sight of him as he rolled over, then tried to turn his head away from the disgust of his own muzzle, shaking his little snout with a sort of horror, and trying to sneeze it off. My sister gave a yell of despair, and dashed out with a rag and a pan of water, weeping wildly. She sat in the middle of the yard with the befouled puppy, and shedding bitter tears she wiped him and washed him clean. Loudly she reproached my mother. 'Look how much bigger you are than he is. It's a shame, it's a shame!'

'You ridiculous little lunatic, you've undone all the good it would do him, with your soft ways. Why is my life made a curse with animals! Haven't I enough as it is -'

There was a subdued tension afterwards. Rex was a little white chasm between us and our parent.

He became clean. But then another tragedy loomed. He must be docked. His floating puppy-tail must be docked short. This time my father was the enemy. My mother agreed with us that it was an unnecessary cruelty. But my

father was adamant. 'The dog'll look a fool all his life, if he's not docked.' And there was no getting away from it. To add to the horror, poor Rex's tail must be *bitten* off. Why bitten? we asked aghast. We were assured that biting was the only way. A man would take the little tail and just nip it through with his teeth, at a certain joint. My father lifted his lips and bared his incisors, to suit the description. We shuddered. But we were in the hands of fate.

Rex was carried away, and a man called Rowbotham bit off the superfluity of his tail in the Nag's Head, for a quart of best and bitter. We lamented our poor diminished puppy, but agreed to find him more manly and *comme il faut*. We should always have been ashamed of his little whip of a tail, if it had not been shortened. My father said it had made a man of him.

Perhaps it had. For now his true nature came out. And his true nature, like so much else, was dual. First he was a fierce, canine little beast, a beast of rapine and blood. He longed to hunt, savagely. He lusted to set his teeth in his prey. It was no joke with him. The old canine Adam stood first in him, the dog with fangs and glaring eyes. He flew at us when we annoyed him. He flew at all intruders, particularly the postman. He was almost a peril to the neighbourhood. But not quite. Because close second in his nature stood that fatal need to love, the *besoin d'aimer* which at last makes an end of liberty. He had a terrible, terrible necessity to love, and this trammelled the native, savage hunting beast which he was. He was torn between two great impulses: the native impulse to hunt and kill, and the strange, secondary, supervening impulse to love and obey. If he had been left to my father and mother, he would have run wild and got himself shot. As it was, he loved us children with a fierce, joyous love. And we loved him.

When we came home from school we would see him

standing at the end of the entry, cocking his head wistfully at the open country in front of him, and meditating whether to be off or not: a white, inquiring little figure, with green savage freedom in front of him. A cry from a far distance from one of us, and like a bullet he hurled himself down the road, in a mad game. Seeing him coming, my sister invariably turned and fled, shrieking with delighted terror. And he would leap straight up her back, and bite her and tear her clothes. But it was only an ecstasy of savage love, and she knew it. She didn't care if he tore her pinafores. But my mother did.

My mother was maddened by him. He was a little demon. At the least provocation, he flew. You had only to sweep the floor, and he bristled and sprang at the broom. Nor would he let go. With his scruff erect and his nostrils snorting rage, he would turn up the whites of his eyes at my mother, as she wrestled at the other end of the broom. 'Leave go, sir, leave go!' She wrestled and stamped her foot, and he answered with horrid growls. In the end it was she who had to let go. Then she flew at him, and he flew at her. All the time we had him, he was within a hair's-breadth of savagely biting her. And she knew it. Yet he always kept sufficient self-control.

We children loved his temper. We would drag the bones from his mouth, and put him into such paroxysms of rage that he would twist his head right over and lay it on the ground upside-down, because he didn't know what to do with himself, the savage was so strong in him and he must fly at us. 'He'll fly at your throat one of these days,' said my father. Neither he nor my mother dared have touched Rex's bone. It was enough to see him bristle and roll the whites of his eyes when they came near. How near he must have been to driving his teeth right into us, cannot be told. He was a horrid sight snarling and crouching at us. But we only laughed and rebuked him.

And he would whimper in the sheer torment of his need to attack us.

He never did hurt us. He never hurt anybody, though the neighbourhood was terrified of him. But he took to hunting. To my mother's disgust, he would bring large dead bleeding rats and lay them on the hearth-rug, and she had to take them up on a shovel. For he would not remove them. Occasionally he brought a mangled rabbit, and sometimes, alas, fragmentary poultry. We were in terror of prosecution. Once he came home bloody and feathery and rather sheepish-looking. We cleaned him and questioned him and abused him. Next day we heard of six dead ducks. Thank heaven no one had seen him.

But he was disobedient. If he saw a hen he was off, and calling would not bring him back. He was worst of all with my father, who would take him walks on Sunday morning. My mother would not walk a yard with him. Once, walking with my father, he rushed off at some sheep in a field. My father yelled in vain. The dog was at the sheep, and meant business. My father crawled through the hedge, and was upon him in time. And now the man was in a paroxysm of rage. He dragged the little beast into the road and thrashed him with a walking stick.

'Do you know you're thrashing that dog unmercifully?' said a passerby.

'Ay, an' mean to,' shouted my father.

The curious thing was that Rex did not respect my father any the more, for the beatings he had from him. He took much more heed of us children, always.

But he let us down also. One fatal Saturday he disappeared. We hunted and called, but no Rex. We were bathed, and it was bed-time, but we would not go to bed. Instead we sat in a row in our nightdresses on the sofa. and wept without stopping. This drove our mother mad.

'Am I going to put up with it? Am I? And all for that

hateful little beast of a dog! He shall go! If he's not gone now, he shall go.'

Our father came in late, looking rather queer, with his hat over his eye. But in his staccato tippled fashion he tried to be consoling.

'Never mind, my duckie, I s'll look for him in the morning.'

Sunday came – oh, such a Sunday. We cried, and didn't eat. We scoured the land, and for the first time realized how empty and wide the earth is, when you're looking for something. My father walked for many miles – all in vain. Sunday dinner, with rhubarb pudding, I remember, and an atmosphere of abject misery that was unbearable.

'Never,' said my mother, 'never shall an animal set foot in this house again, while I live. I knew what it would be! I knew.'

The day wore on, and it was the black gloom of bedtime, when we heard a scratch and an impudent little whine at the door. In trotted Rex, mud-black, disreputable, and impudent. His air of offhand 'How d'ye do!' was indescribable. He trotted around with *suffisance*, wagging his tail as if to say, 'Yes, I've come back. But I didn't need to. I can carry on remarkably well by myself.' Then he walked to his water, and drank noisily and ostentatiously. It was rather a slap in the eye for us.

He disappeared once or twice in this fashion. We never knew where he went. And we began to feel that his heart was not so golden as we had imagined it.

But one fatal day reappeared my uncle and the dog-cart. He whistled to Rex, and Rex trotted up. But when he wanted to examine the lusty, sturdy dog, Rex became suddenly still, then sprang free. Quite jauntily he trotted round – but out of reach of my uncle. He leaped up, licking our faces, and trying to make us play.

'Why, what ha' you done wi' the dog – you've made a

fool of him. He's softer than grease. You've ruined him. You've made a damned fool of him,' shouted my uncle.

Rex was captured and hauled off to the dog-cart and tied to the seat. He was in a frenzy. He yelped and shrieked and struggled, and was hit on the head, hard, with the butt-end of my uncle's whip, which only made him struggle more frantically. So we saw him driven away, our beloved Rex, frantically, madly fighting to get to us from the high dog-cart, and being knocked down, while we stood in the street in mute despair.

After which, black tears, and a little wound which is still alive in our hearts.

I saw Rex only once again, when I had to call just once at The Good Omen. He must have heard my voice, for he was upon me in the passage before I knew where I was. And in the instant I knew how he loved us. He really loved us. And in the same instant there was my uncle with a whip, beating and kicking him back, and Rex cowering, bristling, snarling.

My uncle swore many oaths, how we had ruined the dog for ever, made him vicious, spoiled him for showing purposes, and been altogether a pack of mard-soft fools not fit to be trusted with any dog but a gutter-mongrel.

Poor Rex! We heard his temper was incurably vicious, and he had to be shot.

And it was our fault. We had loved him too much, and he had loved us too much. We never had another pet.

It is a strange thing, love. Nothing but love has made the dog lose his wild freedom, to become the servant of man. And this very servility or completeness of love makes him a term of deepest contempt - 'You dog!'

We should not have loved Rex so much, and he should not have loved us. There should have been a measure. We



tended, all of us, to overstep the limits of our own natures. He should have stayed outside human limits, we should have stayed outside canine limits. Nothing is more fatal than the disaster of too much love. My uncle was right, we had ruined the dog.

My uncle was a fool, for all that.

## *A Prelude*

'Sweet is pleasure after pain . . .'

IN the kitchen of a small farm a little woman sat cutting bread and butter. The glow of the clear, ruddy fire was on her shining cheek and white apron; but grey hair will not take the warm caress of firelight.

She skilfully spread the softened butter, and cut off great slices from the floury loaf in her lap. Already two plates were piled, but she continued to cut.

Outside the naked ropes of the creeper tapped and lashed at the window.

The grey-haired mother looked up, and, setting the butter on the hearth, rose and went to look out. The sky was heavy and grey as she saw it in the narrow band over the near black wood. So she turned and went to look through the tiny window which opened from the deep recess on the opposite side of the room. The northern sky was blacker than ever.

She turned away with a little sigh, and took a duster from the red, shining warming-pan to take the bread from the oven. Afterwards she laid the table for five.

There was a rumbling and a whirring in the corner, and the clock struck five. Like many clocks in farmers' kitchens it was more than half an hour fast. The little woman hurried about, bringing milk and other things from the dairy; lifting the potatoes from the fire, peeping through the window anxiously. Very often her neck ached with watching the gate for a sign of approach. There was a click of the yard gate. She ran to the window, but turned away again, and catching up the blue enamelled teapot, dropped into it a handful of tea from the caddy, and poured on the

water. A clinking scrape of iron-shod boots sounded outside, then the door opened with a burst as a burly, bearded man entered. He drooped at the shoulders, and leaned forward as a man who has worked all his life.

'Hello, Mother,' he said loudly and cheerfully. 'Am I first? Aren't any of the lads down yet? Fred will be here in a minute.'

'I wish they would come,' said his wife, 'or else it'll rain before they're here.'

'Ay,' he assented, 'it's beginning, and it's cold rain an' all. Bit of sleet, I think,' and he sat down heavily in his armchair, looking at his wife as she knelt and turned the bread, and took a large jar of stewed apples from the oven.

'Well, Mother,' he said with a pleasant, comfortable little smile, 'here's another Christmas for you and me. They keep passing us by.'

'Ay,' she answered, the effects of her afternoon's brooding now appearing. 'They come and go, but they never find us any better off.'

'It seems so,' he said, a shade of regret appearing momentarily over his cheerfulness. 'This year we've certainly had some very bad luck. But we keep straight . . . and we never regret that Christmas - see, it's twenty-seven years since . . . twenty-seven years.'

'No, perhaps not, but there's Fred as hasn't had above three pounds for the whole year's work, and the other two at the pit.'

'Well, what can I do? If I hadn't lost the biggest part of the hay, and them two beasts . . .'

'If . . . Besides, what prospects has he? Here he is working year in, year out for you and getting nothing at the end of it. When you were his age, when you were twenty-five, you were married and had two children. How can he ask anybody to marry him?'

'I don't know that he wants to. He's fairly contented. Don't be worrying about him and upsetting him. Besides, we may have a good year next year, and we can make this up.'

'Ay, so you say.'

'Don't fret yourself tonight, lass. It's true things haven't gone as we hoped they would. I never thought to see you doing all the work you have to do, but we've been very comfortable, all things considered, haven't we?'

'I never thought to see my first lad a farm labourer at twenty-five, and the other two in the pit. Two of my sons in the pit.'

'I'm sure I've done what I could, and . . .' but he heard a scraping outside, and he said no more.

The eldest son tramped in, his great boots and his leggings all covered with mud. He took off his wet overcoat, and stood on the hearth-rug, his hands spread out behind him in the warmth of the fire. Looking smilingly at his mother, as she moved about the kitchen, he said: 'You do look warm and cosy, Mother. When I was coming up with the last load I thought of you trotting about in that big, white apron, getting tea ready, watching the weather. There are the lads. Aren't you quite contented now . . . perfectly happy?'

She laughed an odd little laugh, and poured out the tea. The boys came in from the pit, wet and dirty, with clean streaks down their faces where the rain had trickled. They changed their clothes and sat at the table. The elder was a big, heavy loosely-made fellow, with a long nose and chin, and comical wrinkling round his eyes. The younger, Arthur, was a handsome lad, dark-haired, with ruddy colour glowing through his dirt, and dark eyes. When he talked and laughed the red of his lips and the whiteness of his teeth and eyeballs stood out in startling contrast to the surrounding black.

'Mother, I'm glad to see thee,' he said, looking at her with frank, boyish affection.

'There, Mother, what more can you want?' asked her husband.

She took a bite of bread and butter, and looked up with a quaint, comical glance, as if she were given only her just dues, but for all that it pleased and amused her, only she was half shy and a grain doubtful.

'Lad,' said Henry, 'it's Christmas Eve. The fire ought to burn its brightest.'

'Yes, I will have just another potato, seeing as Christmas is the time for feeding. What are we going to do? Are we going to have a party, Mother?'

'Yes, if you want one.'

'Party,' laughed the father, 'who'd come?'

'We might ask somebody. We could have Nellie Wycherley who used to come, an' David Garton.'

'We shall not do for Nellie nowadays,' said the father. 'I saw her on Sunday morning on the top road. She was drivin' home with another young woman, an' she stopped an' asked me if we'd got any holly with berries on, an' I said we hadn't.'

Fred looked up from the book he was reading over tea. He had dark brown eyes, something like his mother's, and they always drew attention when he turned them on anyone.

'There is a tree covered in the wood,' he said.

'Well,' answered the irrepressible Henry, 'that's not ours, is it? An' if she's got that proud she won't come near to see us, am I goin' choppin' trees down for her? If she'd come here an' say she wanted a bit, I'd fetch her half the wood in. But when she sits in the trap and looks down on you an' asks, "Do you happen to hev a bush of berried holly in your hedges? Preston can't find a sprig to decorate the house, and I hev some people coming down

from town," then I tell her we're all crying because we've none to decorate ourselves, and we want it the more because nobody's coming, neither from the town nor th' country, an' we're likely to forget it's Christmas if we've neither folks nor things to remind us.'

'What did she say?' asked the mother.

'She said she was sorry, an' I told her not to bother, it's better lookin' at folks than at bits o' holly. The other lass was laughing, an' she wanted to know what folks. I told her any as hadn't got more pricks than a holly bush to keep you off.'

'Ha! ha!' laughed the father, 'did she take it?'

'The other girl nudged her, and they both began a-laughing. Then Nellie told me to send down the guysers tonight. I said I would, but they're not going now.'

'Why not?' asked Fred.

'Billy Simpson's got a gathered face, and Ward's gone to Nottingham.'

'The company down at Ramsley Mill will have nobody to laugh at tonight,' said Arthur.

'Tell you what,' exclaimed Henry, 'we'll go.'

'How can we, three of us?' asked Arthur.

'Well,' persisted Henry, 'we could dress up so as they'd niver know us, an' hae a bit o' fun.'

'Hey!' he suddenly shouted to Fred, who was reading, and taking no notice. 'Hey, we're going to the Mill guysering.'

'Who is?' asked the elder brother, somewhat surprised.

'You an' me, an' our Arthur. I'll be Beelzebub.'

Here he distorted his face to look diabolic, so that everybody roared.

'Go,' said his father, 'you'll make our fortunes.'

'What!' he exclaimed, 'by making a fool of myself? They say fools for luck. What fools wise folk must be.'

Well, I'll be the devil – are you shocked, Mother? What will you be, Arthur?’

‘I don’ care,’ was the answer. ‘We can put some of that red paint on our faces, and some soot, they’d never know us. Shall we go, Fred?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Why, I should like to see her with her company, to see if she has very fine airs. We could leave some holly for her in the scullery.’

‘All right, then.’

After tea all helped with the milking and feeding. Then Fred took a hedge knife and a hurricane lamp and went into the wood to cut some of the richly-berried holly. When he got back he found his brothers roaring with laughter before the mirror. They were smeared with red and black, and had fastened on grotesque horsehair moustaches, so that they were entirely unrecognizable.

‘Oh, you are hideous,’ cried their mother. ‘Oh, it’s shameful to disfigure the work of the Almighty like that.’

Fred washed and proceeded to dress. They could not persuade him to use paint or soot. He rolled his sleeves up to the shoulder, and wrapped himself in a great striped horse rug. Then he tied a white cloth round his head, as the Bedouins do, and pulled out his moustaches to fierce points. He looked at himself with approval, took an old sword from the wall, and held it in one naked muscular arm.

‘Decidedly,’ he thought, ‘it is very picturesque, and I look very fine.’

‘Oh, that is grand,’ said his mother, as he entered the kitchen. His dark eyes glowed with pleasure to hear her say it. He seemed somewhat excited, this bucolic young man. His tanned skin shone rich and warm under the white cloth, its coarseness hidden by the yellow lamplight. His eyes glittered like a true Arab’s and it was to be noticed

that the muscles of his sun-browned arm were tense with the grip of the broad hand.

It was remarkable how the dark folds of the rug and the flowing burnous glorified this young farmer, who in his best clothes looked awkward and ungainly, and whose face in a linen collar showed coarse, owing to exposure from the weather, and long application to heavy labour.

They set out to cross the two of their own fields, and two of their neighbour's, which separated their home from the Mill. A few uncertain flakes of snow were eddying down, melting as they settled. The ground was wet, and the night very dark. But they knew the way well, and were soon at the gate leading to the mill yard. The dog began to bark furiously, but they called to him, 'Trip, Trip,' and, knowing their voices, he was quieted.

Henry gave a thundering knock, and bawled in stentorian tones, 'Dun yer want guysers?'

A man came to the door, very tall, very ungainly, very swarthy.

'We non want yer,' he said, talking down his nose.

'Here comes Beelzebub,' banged away Henry, thumping a pan which he carried. 'Here comes Beelzebub, an' he's come to th' right place.'

A big, bonny farm girl came to the door.

'Who is it?' she asked.

'Beelzebub, you know him well,' was the answer.

'I'll ask Miss Ellen if she wants you.'

Henry winked a red and black wink at the maid, saying, 'Never keep Satan on the doorstep,' and he stepped into the scullery.

The girl ran away and soon was heard a laughing and bright talking of women's voices drawing nearer to the kitchen.

'Tell them to come in,' said a voice.

The three trooped in, and glanced round the big



## A PRELUDE

kitchen. They could only see Betty, seated to them as near as possible on the squab, her father, black and surly, in his armchair, and two women's figures in the deep shadows of one of the great ingle-nook seats.

'Ah,' said Beelzebub, 'this is a bit more like it, a bit hotter. The Devils feel at home here.'

They began the ludicrous old Christmas play that everyone knows so well. Beelzebub acted with much force, much noise, and some humour. St George, that is Fred, played his part with zeal and earnestness most amusing, but at one of the most crucial moments he entirely forgot his speech, which, however, was speedily rectified by Beelzebub. Arthur was nervous and awkward, so that Beelzebub supplied him with most of the speeches.

After much horseplay, stabbing, falling on the floor, bangings of dripping-pans, and ludicrous striving to fill in the blanks, they came to an end.

They waited in silence.

'Well, what next?' asked a voice from the shadows.

'It's your turn,' said Beelzebub.

'What do you want?'

'As little as you have the heart to give.'

'But,' said another voice, one they knew well, 'we have no heart to give at all.'

'You did not know your parts well,' said Blanche, the stranger. 'The big fellow in the blanket deserves nothing.'

'What about me?' asked Arthur.

'You,' answered the same voice, 'oh, you're a nice boy, and a lady's thanks are enough reward for you.'

He blushed and muttered something unintelligible.

'There'll be the Devil to pay,' suggested Beelzebub.

'Give the Devil his dues, Nell,' said Blanche, choking again with laughter. Nellie threw a large silver coin on the flagstone floor, but she was nervous, and it rolled to the feet of Preston in his armchair.

‘ ‘Alf-a-crerl!’ he exclaimed, ‘gie ’em thrippence, an’ they’re non worth that much.’

This was too much for the chivalrous St George. He could bear no longer to stand in the ridiculous garb before his scornful lady-love and her laughing friend.

He snatched off his burnous and his robe, flung them over one arm, and with the other caught back Beelzebub, who would have gone to pick up the money. There he stood, St George metamorphosed into a simple young farmer, with ruffled curly black hair, a heavy frown, and bare arms.

‘Won’t you let him have it?’ asked Blanche. ‘Well, what do you want?’ she continued.

‘Nothing, thanks. I’m sorry we troubled you.’

‘Come on,’ he said, drawing the reluctant Beelzebub, and the three made their exit. Blanche laughed and laughed again to see the discomfited knight tramp out, rolling down his shirt sleeves.

Nellie did not laugh. Seeing him turn, she saw him again as a child, before her father had made money by the cattle-dealing, when she was a poor, wild little creature. But her father had grown rich, and the mill was a big farm, and when the old cattle dealer had died, she became sole mistress. Then Preston, their chief man, came with Betty and Sarah, to live in, and take charge of the farm.

Nellie had seen little of her old friends since then. She had stayed a long time in town, and when she called on them after her return found them cool and estranged. So she had not been again, and now it was almost a year since she had spoken many words to Fred.

Her brief meditations were disturbed by a scream from Betty in the scullery, followed by the wild rush of that damsel into the kitchen.

‘What’s up?’ asked her father.

'There's somebody there got hold of my legs.'

Nellie felt suddenly her own loneliness. Preston struck a match and investigated. He returned with a bunch of glittering holly, thick with scarlet berries.

'Here's yer somebody,' said he, flinging the bunch down on the table.

'Oh, that is pretty,' exclaimed Blanche. Nellie rose, looked, then hurried down the passage to the sitting-room, followed by her friend. There, to the consternation of Blanche, she sat down and began to cry.

'Whatever is the matter?' asked Blanche.

It was some time before she had a reply, then, 'It's so miserable and so lonely. I do think Will and Harry and Louie and all the others were mean not to come, then this wouldn't have happened. It was such a shame – such a shame.'

'What was a shame?' asked Blanche.

'Why, when he had got me that holly, and come down to see . . .' she ended, blushing.

'Whom do you mean – the Bedouin?'

'And I had not seen him for months, and he will think I am just a mean, proud thing.'

'You don't mean to say you care for him?'

Nellie's tears began to flow again. 'I do, and I wish this miserable farm and bit of money had never come between us. He'll never come again, never, I know.'

'Then,' said Blanche, 'you must go to him.'

'Yes, and I will.'

'Come along, then.'

In the meantime the disappointed brothers had reached home. Fred had thrown down his Bedouin wardrobe, and put on his coat, muttering something about having a walk up the village. Then he had gone out, his mother's eyes watching his exit with helpless grief, his father looking over his spectacles in a half-surprised paternal sympathy.

However, they heard him tramp down the yard and enter the barn, and they knew he would soon recover. Then the lads went out, and nothing was heard in the kitchen save the beat of the clock and the rustle of the newspaper, or the rattle of the board, as the mother rolled out paste for the mince-pies.

In the pitch-dark barn, the rueful Bedouin told himself that he expected no other than this, and that it was high time he ceased fooling himself with fancies, that he was well-cured, that even if she had invited himself to stay, how could he; she must think he wanted badly to become master of Ramsley Mill. What a fool he had been to go – what a fool!

‘But,’ he argued, ‘let her think what she likes, I don’t care. She may remember if she can that I used to sole her boots with my father’s leather, and she went home in mine. She can remember that my mother taught her how to write and sew decently. I should say she must sometimes.’ Then he admitted to himself that he was sure she did not forget. He could feel quite well that she was wishing that this long estrangement might cease.

‘But,’ came the question, ‘why doesn’t she end it? Pah, it’s only my conceit; she thinks more of those glib, grinning fellows from the clerks’ stools. Let her, what do I care!’

Suddenly he heard voices from the field at the back, and sat up listening.

‘Oh, it’s a regular slough,’ said someone. ‘We can never get through the gate. See, let us climb the stackyard fence. They’ve put some new rails in. Can you manage, Blanche? Here, just between the lilac bush and the stack. What a blessing they keep Chris at the front! Mind, bend under this plum tree. Dare we go, Blanche?’

‘Go on, go on,’ whispered Blanche, and they crept up to the tiny window, through which the lamplight streamed

uninterrupted. Fred stole out of the barn, and hid behind the great water-butt. He saw them stoop and creep to the window and peep through.

In the kitchen sat the father, smoking and appearing to read, but really staring into the fire. The mother was putting the top crusts on the little pies, but she was interrupted by the need to wipe her eyes.

'Oh, Blanche,' whispered Nellie, 'he's gone out.'

'It looks like it,' assented the other.

'Perhaps he's not,' resumed the former bravely. 'He's very likely only in the parlour.'

'That's all right, then,' said Blanche, 'I thought we should have seen him looking so miserable. But, of course, he wouldn't let his mother see it.'

'Certainly not,' said Nellie.

Fred chuckled.

'But,' she continued doubtfully, 'if he has gone out, whatever shall we do? What can we tell his mother?'

'Tell her, we came up for fun.'

'But if he's out?'

'Stay till he comes home.'

'If it's late?'

'It's Christmas Eve.'

'Perhaps he doesn't care after all.'

'You think he does, so do I; and you're quite sure you want him?'

'You know I do, Blanche, and I always have done.'

'Let us begin, then.'

'What? Good King Wenceslas?'

The mother and father started as the two voices suddenly began to carol outside. She would have run to the door, but her husband waved her excitedly back. 'Let them finish,' his eyes shining, 'let them finish.'

The girls had retired from the window lest they should be seen, and stood near the water-butt. When the old carol

was finished, Nellie began the beautiful song of Gior-dani's:

Turn once again, heal thou my pain,  
Parted from thee my heart is sore.

As she sang she stood holding a bough of the old plum tree, so close to Fred that by leaning forward he could have touched her coat. Carried away by the sweet pathos of her song, he could hardly refrain from rising and flinging his arms round her.

She finished; the door opened, showing a little woman holding out her hands.

Both girls made a motion towards her, but –

'Nell, Nell,' he whispered, and caught her in his arms. She gave a little cry of alarm and delight. Blanche stepped into the kitchen and shut the door, laughing.

She sat in the low rocking-chair, swinging to and fro in a delighted excitement, chattering brightly about a hundred things. And with a keen woman's eye she noticed the mother put her hands on her husband's as she sat on the sofa by his chair, and saw him hold the shining stiffened hand in one of his, and stroke it with old undiminished affection.

Soon the two came in, Nellie all blushing. Without a word she ran and kissed the little mother, lingering a moment over her before she turned to the quiet embrace of the father. Then she took off her hat, and brushed back the brown tendrils all curled so prettily by the damp.

Already she was at home.

## *Lessford's Rabbits*

ON Tuesday mornings I have to be at school at half past eight to administer the free breakfasts. Dinners are given in the canteen in one of the mean streets, where the children feed in a Church Mission room appropriately adorned by Sunday School cartoons showing the blessing of the little ones, and the feeding of the five thousand. We serve breakfasts, however, in school, in the wood-work room high up under the roof.

Tuesday morning sees me rushing up the six short flights of stone stairs, at twenty-five minutes to nine. It is my disposition to be late. I generally find a little crowd of children waiting in the 'art' room – so called because it is surrounded with a strip of blackboard too high for the tallest boy to reach – which is a sort of ante-room to the workshop where breakfast is being prepared. I hasten through the little throng to see if things are ready. There are two big girls putting out the basins, and another one looking in the pan to see if the milk is boiling. The room is warm, and seems more comfortable because the windows are high up under the beams of the slanting roof and the walls are all panelled with ruddy gold, varnished wood. The work bench is in the form of three sides of a square – or of an oblong – as the dining tables of the ancients used to be, I believe. At one of the extremities are the three vises, and at the other the great tin pan, like a fish kettle, standing on a gas ring. When the boys' basins are placed along the outer edge of the bench, the girls' on the inner, and the infants' on the lockers against the wall, we are ready. I look at the two rows of assorted basins, and think of the three bears. Then I admit the thirty, who bundle to their places and stand in position, girls on the

inside facing boys on the outside, and quaint little infants with their toes kicking the lockers along the walls.

Last week the infant mistress did not come up, so I was alone. She is an impressive woman, who always commands the field. I stand in considerable awe of her. I feel like a reckless pleasure boat with one extravagant sail misbehaving myself in the track of a heavy earnest coaster when she bears down on me. I was considerably excited to find myself in sole charge. As I ushered in the children, the caretaker, a little fierce-eyed man with hollow cheeks and walrus moustache, entered with the large basket full of chunks of bread. He glared around without bidding me good morning.

‘Miss Culloch not come?’ he asked.

‘As you see,’ I replied.

He grunted, and put down the basket. Then he drew himself up like a fiery prophet, and stretching forth his hairy arm towards the opposite door, shouted loudly to the children:

‘None of you’s got to touch that other door there! You hear – you’re to leave it alone!’

The children stared at him without answering.

‘A brake as I’m making for these doors,’ he said confidentially to me, thrusting forward his extraordinarily hairy lean arms, and putting two fingers of one hand into the palm of the other, as if to explain his invention. I bowed.

‘Nasty things them swing doors’ – he looked up at me with his fierce eyes, and suddenly swished aside his right arm:

‘They come to like *that!*’ he exclaimed, ‘and a child’s fingers is cut off – clean!’ – he looked at me for ratification. I bowed.

‘It’ll be a good thing, I think,’ he concluded, considerably damped. I bowed again. Then he left me. The chief,



almost the only duty of a caretaker, is to review the works of the head and of the staff, as a reviewer does books: at length and according to his superior light.

I told one of the girls to give three chunks of bread to each child, and, having fished a mysterious earwig out of the scalding milk, I filled the large enamelled jug – such as figures and has figured in the drawing lessons of every school in England, I suppose – and doled out the portions – about three-quarters of a pint per senior, and half a pint per infant. Everything was ready. I had to say grace. I dared not launch into the Infant mistress' formula, thanking the Lord for his goodness – 'and may we eat and drink to thine everlasting glory – Amen.' I looked at the boys, dressed in mouldering garments of remote men, at the girls with their rat-tailed hair, and at the infants, quaint little mites on whom I wished, but could not bring myself, to expend my handkerchief, and I wondered what I should say. The only other grace I knew was 'For these and for all good things may the Lord make us truly thankful.' But I wondered whom we should thank for the bad things. I was becoming desperate. I plunged:

'Ready now – hands together, close eyes. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."' I felt myself flushing with confusion – what did I mean? But there was a universal clink of iron spoons on the basins, and a snuffling, slobbering sound of children feeding. They had not noticed, so it was all right. The infants were kneeling and squalling by the lockers, the boys were 'stretching wide their eyes and their mouths at the same time, to admit the spoon. They spilled the milk on their jackets and wiped it off with their sleeves, continuing to eat all the time.

'Don't slobber, lads, be decent,' I said, rebuking them from my superior sphere. They ate more carefully, glancing up at me when the spoon was at their mouths.

I began to count the number – nine boys, seven girls, and eleven infants. Not many. We could never get many boys to give in their names for free meals. I used to ask the Kelletts, who were pinched and pared thin with poverty:

‘Are you sure you don’t want either dinners or breakfasts, Kellet?’

He would look at me curiously, and say, with a peculiar small movement of his thin lips.

‘No Sir.’

‘But have you plenty – quite plenty?’

‘Yes Sir’ – he was very quiet, flushing at my questions. None – or very few – of the boys could endure to accept the meals. Not many parents would submit to the indignity of the officer’s inquirer and the boys, the most foolishly sensitive animals in the world, would, many of them, prefer to go short rather than to partake of charity meals of which all their school-mates were aware.

‘Halket – where is Halket?’ I asked.

‘Please Sir, his mother’s got work,’ replied Lessford, one of my own boys, a ruddy, bonny lad – many of those at breakfast were pictures of health. Lessford was brown-skinned and had fine dark eyes. He was a reticent, irresponsible creature, with a radical incapacity to spell and to read and to draw, but who sometimes scored at arithmetic. I should think he came of a long line of unrelievedly poor people. He was skilled in street lore, and cute at arithmetic, but blunt and blind to everything that needed a little delicacy of perception. He had an irritating habit of looking at me furtively, with his handsome dark eyes, glancing covertly again and again. Yet he was not a sneak; he gave himself the appearance of one. He was a well-built lad, and he looked well in the blue jersey he wore – there were great holes at the elbows, showing the whitish shirt and a brown bit of Lessford. At breakfasts he was a great

eater. He would have five solid pieces of bread, and then ask for more.

We gave them bread and milk one morning, cocoa and currant bread the next. I happened to go one cocoa morning to take charge. Lessford, I noticed, did not eat by any means so much as on bread mornings. I was surprised. I asked him if he did not care for currant loaf, but he said he did. Feeling curious, I asked the other teachers what they thought of him. Mr Hayward, who took a currant bread morning, said he was sure the boy had a breakfast before he came to school; – Mr Jephson, who took a milk morning, said the lad was voracious, that it amused him to try to feed him up. I watched – turning suddenly to ask if anyone wanted a little more milk, and glancing over the top of the milk pan as I was emptying it.

I caught him: I saw him push a piece of bread under his jersey, glancing furtively with a little quiver of apprehension up at me. I did not appear to notice, but when he was going downstairs I followed him and asked him to go into the class-room with me. I closed the door and sat down at my table: he stood hanging his head and marking with his foot on the floor. He came to me, very slowly, when I bade him. I put my hand on his jersey, and felt something underneath. He did not resist me, and I drew it out. It was his cap. He smiled, he could not help it, at my discomfiture. Then he pulled his lips straight and looked sulky. I tried again – and this time I found three pieces of bread in a kind of rough pocket inside the waist of his trousers. He looked at them blackly as I arranged them on the table before him, flushing under his brown skin.

‘What does this mean?’ I asked. He hung his head, and would not answer.

‘You may as well tell me – what do you want this for?’

‘Eat,’ he muttered, keeping his face bent. I put my hand under his chin and lifted up his face. He shut his eyes, and

tried to move his face aside, as if from a very strong light which hurt him.

‘That is not true,’ I said. ‘I know perfectly well it is not true. You have a breakfast before you come. You do not come to eat. You come to take the food away.’

‘I never!’ he exclaimed sulkily.

‘No,’ I said. ‘You did not take any yesterday. But the day before you did.’

‘I never, I never!!’ he declared, more emphatically, in the tone of one who scores again. I considered.

‘Oh no – the day before was Sunday. Let me see. You took some on Thursday – yes, that was the last time – You took four or five pieces of bread –’ I hung fire; he did not contradict; ‘five, I believe,’ I added. He scraped his toe on the ground. I had guessed aright. He could not deny the definite knowledge of a number.

But I could not get another word from him. He stood and heard all I had to say, but he would not look up, or answer anything. I felt angry.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘if you come to breakfasts any more, you will be reported.’

Next day, when asked why he was absent from breakfast, he said his father had got a job.

He was a great nuisance for coming with dirty boots. Evidently he went roaming over fields and everywhere. I concluded he must have a strain of gipsy in him, a mongrel form common in the south of London. Halket was his great friend. They never played together at school, and they had no apparent common interests. Halket was a debonair, clever lad who gave great promise of turning out a neer-do-well. He was very lively, soon moved from tears to laughter; Lessford was an inveterate sulker. Yet they always hung together.

One day my bread-stealer arrived at half past two, when the register was closed. He was sweating, dishevelled, and

his breast was heaving. He gave no word of explanation, but stood near the great blackboard, his head dropped, one leg loosely apart, panting.

'Well!' I exclaimed, 'this is a nice thing! What have you to say?' I rose from my chair.

Evidently he had nothing to say.

'Come on,' I said finally. 'No foolery! Let me hear it.' He knew he would have to speak. He looked up at me, his dark eyes blazing:

'My rabbits has all gone!' he cried, as a man would announce his wife and children slain. I heard Halket exclaim. I looked at him. He was half-out of the desk, his mercurial face blank with dismay.

'Who's 'ad 'em?' he said, breathing the words almost in a whisper.

'Did you leave th' door open?' Lessford bent forward like a serpent about to strike as he asked this. Halket shook his head solemnly:

'No! I've not been near 'em today.'

There was a pause. It was time for me to reassume my position of authority. I told them both to sit down, and we continued the lesson. Halket crept near his comrade and began to whisper to him, but he received no response. Lessford sulked fixedly, not moving his head for more than an hour.

At playtime I began to question Halket: 'Please Sir – we had some rabbits in a place on the allotments. We used to gather manure for a man, and he let us have half of his tool-house in the garden –.'

'How many had you – rabbits?'

'Please Sir – they varied. When we had young ones we used to have sixteen sometimes. We had two brown does and a black buck.'

I was somewhat taken back by this.

'How long have you had them?'

'A long time now Sir. We've had six lots of young ones.'

'And what did you do with them?'

'Fatten them, Sir' – he spoke with a little triumph, but he was reluctant to say much more.

'And what did you fatten them on?'

The boy glanced swiftly at me. He reddened, and for the first time became confused.

'Green stuff, what we had given us out of the gardens, and what we got out of the fields.'

'And bread,' I answered quietly.

He looked at me. He saw I was not angry, only ironical. For a few moments he hesitated, whether to lie or not. Then he admitted, very subdued:

'Yes Sir.'

'And what did you do with the rabbits?' – he did not answer – 'Come, tell me. I can find out whether or not.'

'Sold them,' – he hung his head guiltily.

'Who did the selling?'

'I, Sir – to a greengrocer.'

'For how much?'

'Eightpence each.'

'And did your mothers know?'

'No Sir.' He was very subdued and guilty.

'And what did you do with the money?'

'Go to the Empire – generally.'

I asked him a day or two later if they had found the rabbits. They had not. I asked Halket what he supposed had become of them.

'Please Sir – I suppose somebody must 'a stole them. The door was not broken. You could open our padlock with a hair-pin. I suppose somebody must have come after us last night when we'd fed them. I think I know who it is, too, Sir.' He shook his head widely – 'There's a place where you can get into the allotments off the field –'

## *A Lesson on a Tortoise*

It was the last lesson on Friday afternoon, and this, with Standard VI, was Nature Study from half-past three till half-past four. The last lesson of the week is a weariness to teachers and scholars. It is the end; there is no need to keep up the tension of discipline and effort any longer, and, yielding to weariness, a teacher is spent.

But Nature Study is a pleasant lesson. I had got a big old tortoise, who had not yet gone to sleep, though November was darkening the early afternoon, and I knew the boys would enjoy sketching him. I put him under the radiator to warm while I went for a large empty shell that I had sawn in two to show the ribs of some ancient tortoise absorbed in his bony coat. When I came back I found Joe, the old reptile, stretching slowly his skinny neck, and looking with indifferent eyes at the two intruding boys who were kneeling beside him. I was too good-tempered to send them out again into the playground, too slack with the great relief of Friday afternoon. So I bade them put out the Nature books ready. I crouched to look at Joey, and stroked his horny, blunt head with my finger. He was quite lively. He spread out his legs and gripped the floor with his flat hand-like paws, then he slackened again as if from a yawn, dropping his head meditatively.

I felt pleased with myself, knowing that the boys would be delighted with the lesson. 'He will not want to walk,' I said to myself, 'and if he takes a sleepy stride, they'll be just in ecstasy, and I can easily calm him down to his old position.' So I anticipated their entry. At the end of play-time I went to bring them in. They were a small class of about thirty – my own boys. A difficult, mixed class, they were, consisting of six London Home boys, five boys

from a fairly well-to-do Home for the children of actors, and a set of commoners varying from poor lads who hobbled to school, crippled by broken enormous boots, to boys who brought soft, light shoes to wear in school on snowy days. The Gordons were a difficult set; you could pick them out: crop haired, coarsely dressed lads, distrustful, always ready to assume the defensive. They would lie till it made my heart sick, if they were charged with offence, but they were willing, and would respond beautifully to an appeal. The actors were of different fibre: some gentle, a pleasure even to look at; others polite and obedient, but indifferent, covertly insolent and vulgar; all of them more or less gentlemanly.

The boys crowded round the table noisily as soon as they discovered Joe. 'Is he alive? - Look, his head's coming out! He'll bite you? - He *won't!*' - with much scorn - 'Please Sir, do tortoises bite?' I hurried them off to their seats in a little group in front, and pulled the table up to the desks. Joe kept fairly still. The boys nudged each other excitedly, making half audible remarks concerning the poor reptile, looking quickly from me to Joe and then to their neighbours. I set them sketching, but in their pleasure at the novelty they could not be still:

'Please Sir - shall we draw the marks on the shell? Please Sir, has he only got four toes?' - 'Toes!' echoes somebody, covertly delighted at the absurdity of calling the grains of claws 'toes'. 'Please Sir, he's moving - Please Sir!'

I stroked his neck and calmed him down:

'Now don't make me wish I hadn't brought him. That's enough. Miles - you shall go to the back and draw twigs if I hear you again! Enough now - be still, get on with the drawing, it's hard!'

I wanted peace for myself. They began to sketch



diligently. I stood and looked across at the sunset, which I could see facing me through my window, a great gold sunset, very large and magnificent, rising up in immense gold beauty beyond the town, that was become a low dark strip of nothingness under the wonderful up-building of the western sky. The light, the thick, heavy golden sunlight which is only seen in its full dripping splendour in town, spread on the desks and the floor like gold lacquer. I lifted my hands, to take the sunlight on them, smiling faintly to myself, trying to shut my fingers over its tangible richness.

‘Please Sir!’ – I was interrupted – ‘Please Sir, can we have rubbers?’

The question was rather plaintive. I had said they should have rubbers no more. I could not keep my stock, I could not detect the thief among them, and I was weary of the continual degradation of bullying them to try to recover what was lost among them. But it was Friday afternoon, very peaceful and happy. Like a bad teacher, I went back on my word:

‘Well –!’ I said, indulgently.

My monitor, a pale, bright, erratic boy, went to the cupboard and took out a red box.

‘Please Sir!’ he cried, then he stopped and counted again in the box. ‘Eleven! There’s only eleven, Sir, and there were fifteen when I put them away on Wednesday –!’

The class stopped, every face upturned. Joe sunk, and lay flat on his shell, his legs limp. Another of the hateful moments had come. The sunset was smeared out, the charm of the afternoon was smashed like a fair glass that falls to the floor. My nerves seemed to tighten, and to vibrate with sudden tension.

‘Again!’ I cried, turning to the class in passion, to the upturned faces, and the sixty watchful eyes.

‘Again! I am sick of it, sick of it I am! A thieving,

wretched set! – a skulking, mean lot!’ I was quivering with anger and distress.

‘Who is it? You must know! You are all as bad as one another, you hide it – a miserable –!’ I looked round the class in great agitation. The ‘Gordons’ with their distrustful faces, were noticeable:

‘Marples!’ I cried to one of them, ‘where are those rubbers?’

‘I don’t know where they are – I’ve never ’ad no rubbers’ – he almost shouted back, with the usual insolence of his set. I was more angry:

‘You must know! They’re gone – they don’t melt into air, they don’t fly – who took them then? Rawson, do you know anything of them?’

‘No Sir!’ he cried, with impudent indignation.

‘No, you intend to know nothing! Wood, have you any knowledge of these four rubbers?’

‘No!’ he shouted, with absolute insolence.

‘Come here!’ I cried, ‘come here! Fetch the cane, Burton. We’ll make an end, insolence and thieving and all.’

The boy dragged himself to the front of the class, and stood slackly, almost crouching, glaring at me. The rest of the ‘Gordons’ sat upright in their desks, like animals of a pack ready to spring. There was tense silence for a moment. Burton handed me the cane, and I turned from the class to Wood. I liked him best among the Gordons.

‘Now my lad!’ I said. ‘I’ll cane you for impudence first.’

He turned swiftly to me; tears sprang to his eyes.

‘Well,’ he shouted at me, ‘you always pick on the Gordons – you’re always on to us –!’ This was so manifestly untrue that my anger fell like a bird shot in a mid-flight.

‘Why!’ I exclaimed, ‘what a disgraceful untruth! I am always excusing you, letting you off –!’

'But you pick on us – you start on us – you pick on Marples, an' Rawson, an' on me. You always begin with the Gordons.'

'Well,' I answered, justifying myself, 'isn't it natural? Haven't you boys stolen – haven't these boys stolen – several times – and been caught?'

'That doesn't say as we do now,' he replied.

'How am I to know? You don't help me. How do I know? Isn't it natural to suspect you –?'

'Well, it's not us. We know who it is. Everybody knows who it is – only they won't tell.'

'Who know?' I asked.

'Why Rawson, and Maddock, and Newling, and all of 'em.'

I asked these boys if they could tell me. Each one shook his head, and said 'No Sir.' I went round the class. It was the same. They lied to me every one.

'You see,' I said to Wood.

'Well – they won't own up,' he said. 'I shouldn't 'a done if you hadn't 'a been goin' to cane me.'

This frankness was painful, but I preferred it. I made them all sit down. I asked Wood to write his knowledge on a piece of paper, and I promised not to divulge. He would not. I asked the boys he had named, all of them. They refused. I asked them again – I appealed to them.

'Let them all do it then!' said Wood. I tore up scraps of paper, and gave each boy one.

'Write on it the name of the boy you suspect. He is a thief and a sneak. He gives endless pain and trouble to us all. It is your duty.'

They wrote furtively, and quickly doubled up the papers. I collected them in the lid of the rubber box, and sat at the table to examine them. There was dead silence, they all watched me. Joe had withdrawn into his shell, forgotten.

A few papers were blank; several had 'I suspect nobody' – these I threw in the paper basket; two had the name of an old thief, and these I tore up; eleven bore the name of my assistant monitor a splendid, handsome boy, one of the oldest of the actors. I remembered how deferential and polite he had been when I had asked him, how ready to make barren suggestions; I remembered his shifty, anxious look during the questioning; I remembered how eager he had been to do things for me before the monitor came in the room. I knew it was he – without remembering.

'Well!' I said, feeling very wretched when I was convinced that the papers were right. 'Go on with the drawing.'

They were very uneasy and restless, but quiet. From time to time they watched me. Very shortly, the bell rang. I told the two monitors to collect up the things, and I sent the class home. We did not go into prayers. I, and they, were in no mood for hymns and the evening prayer of gratitude.

When the monitors had finished, and I had turned out all the lights but one, I sent home Curwen, and kept my assistant-monitor a moment.

'Ségar, do you know anything of my rubbers?'

'No Sir' – he had a deep, manly voice, and he spoke with earnest protestation – flushing.

'No? Nor my pencils – nor my two books?'

'No Sir! I know nothing about the books.'

'No? The pencils then –?'

'No Sir! Nothing! I don't know anything about them.'

'Nothing, Ségar?'

'No Sir.'

He hung his head, and looked so humiliated, a fine, handsome lad, that I gave it up. Yet I knew he would be dishonest again, when the opportunity arrived.

## A LESSON ON A TORTOISE

‘Very well! You will not help as monitor any more. You will not come into the classroom until the class comes in – any more. You understand?’

‘Yes Sir’ – he was very quiet.

‘Go along then.’

He went out, and silently closed the door. I turned out the last light, tried the cupboards, and went home.

I felt very tired, and very sick. The night had come up, the clouds were moving darkly, and the sordid streets near the school felt like disease in the lamplight.

## *The Fly in the Ointment*

MURIEL had sent me some mauve primroses, slightly weather-beaten, and some honeysuckle – twine threaded with grey-green rosettes, and some timid hazel catkins. They had arrived in a forlorn little cardboard box just as I was rushing off to school.

‘Stick ’em in water!’ I said to Mrs Williams; and I left the house. But those mauve primroses had set my tone for the day: I was dreamy and reluctant; school and the sounds of the boys were unreal, unsubstantial; beyond these were the realities of my poor winter – trodden primroses and the pale hazel catkins that Muriel had sent me. Altogether the boys must have thought me a vacant fool; I regarded them as a punishment upon me.

I rejoiced exceedingly when night came, with the evening star, and the sky flushed dark blue, purple over the golden pomegranates of the lamps. I was as glad as if I had been hurrying home to Muriel, as if she would open the door to me, would keep me a little while in the fire-glow, with the splendid purple of the evening against the window, before she laughed and drew up her head proudly and flashed on the light over the tea-cups. But Eleanor, the girl, opened the door to me, and I poured out my tea in solitary state.

Mrs Williams had set out my winter posy for me on the table, and I thought of all the beautiful things we had done, Muriel and I, at home in the Midlands, of all the beautiful ways she had looked at me, of all the beautiful things I had said to her – or had meant to say. I went on imagining beautiful things to say to her, while she looked at me with her wonderful eyes from among

the fir boughs in the wood. Meanwhile, I talked to my landlady about the neighbours.

Although I had much work to do, and although I laboured away at it, in the end there was nothing done. Then I felt very miserable, and sat still and sulked. At a quarter to eleven I said to myself:

'This will never do,' and I took up my pen and wrote a letter to Muriel.

'It was not fair to send me those robins' – we called the purple primroses 'robins', for no reason, unless that they bloomed in winter – 'they have bewitched me. Their wicked, bleared little pinkish eyes follow me about, and I have to think of you and home, instead of doing what I've got to do. All the time while I was teaching I had a grasshopper chirruping away in my head and the arithmetic rattled like the carts on the street. Poor lads! I read their miserable pieces of composition on "Pancakes" over and over, and never saw them, thinking "the primroses flower now because it is so sheltered under the plum-trees – those old trees with gummy bark". You like biting through a piece of hard, bright gum. If your lips did not get so sticky . . .'

I will not say at what time I finished my letter. I can recall a sensation of being dim, oblivious of everything, smiling to myself as I sealed the envelope; of putting my books and papers in their places without the least knowledge of so doing, keeping the atmosphere of Strelley Mill close round me in my London lodging. I cannot remember turning off the electric light. The next thing of which I am conscious is pushing at the kitchen door.

The kitchen is at the back of the house. Outside in the dark was a little yard and a hand's breadth of garden backed by the railway embankment. I had come down the passage from my room in the front of the house, and

stood pushing at the kitchen door to get a glass for some water. Evidently the oilcloth had turned up a little, and the edge of the door was under it. I woke up irritably, swore a little, pushed harder, and heard the oilcloth rip. Then I bent and put my hand through the small space of the door to flatten the oilcloth.

The kitchen was in darkness save for the red embers lying low in the stove. I started, but rather from sleepy wonder than anything else. The shock was not quite enough to bring me to. Pressing himself flat into the corner between the stove and the wall was a fellow. I wondered, and was disturbed; the greater part of me was away in the Midlands still. So I stood looking and blinking.

'Why?' I said helplessly. I think this very mildness must have terrified him. Immediately he shrank together and began to dodge about between the table and stove, whining, snarling, with an incredibly mongrel sound:

'Don't yer touch me! Don't yer come grabbin' at me! I'll hit you between the eyes with this poker. I ain't done nothin' to you. Don't yer touch me, yer bloody coward!'

All the time he was writhing about in the space in which I had him trapped, between the table and stove. I was much too dazed to do anything but stare. Then my blood seemed to change its quality. I came awake, sick and sharp with pain. It was such a display as I had seen before in school, and I felt again the old misery of helplessness and disgust. He dared not, I knew, strike, unless by trying to get hold of him I terrified him to the momentary madness of such a slum-rat.

'Stop your row!' I said, standing still and leaving him his room. 'Shut your miserable row! Do you want to waken the children?'

'Ah, but don't you touch me, don't you come no nearer!'  
He had stopped writhing about, and was crouching at the



defensive. The little frenzy, too, had gone out of his voice.

‘Put the poker down, you fool’ – I pointed to the corner of the stove, where the poker used to stand. I supplied him with the definite idea of placing the poker in the corner, and in his crazy witless state he could not reject it. He did as I told him, but indefinitely, as if the action were secondhand. The poker, loosely dropped into the corner, slid to the ground with a clatter.

I looked from it to him, feeling him like a burden upon me, and in some way I was afraid of him, for my heart began to beat heavily. His own indefinite clumsiness, and the jangle of the poker on the hearth, and then my sudden spiritual collapse, unnerved him still more. He crouched there abjectly.

I took a box of matches from the mantelpiece and lit the gas at the pendant that hung in the middle of the bare little room. Then I saw that he was a youth of nineteen or so, narrow at the temples, with thin, pinched-looking brows. He was not ugly, nor did he look ill-fed. But he evidently came of a low breed. His hair had been cut close to his skull, leaving a tussocky fringe over his forehead to provide him with a ‘topping’, and to show that it was no prison crop which had bared him.

‘I wasn’t doin’ no harm,’ he whined resentfully, with still an attempt at a threat in his tones. ‘I ’aven’t done nuffin’ to you; you leave me alone. What harm have I done?’

‘Be quiet,’ I said. ‘You’ll wake the children and the people.’

I went to the door and listened. No one was disturbed. Then I closed the door and pulled down the wide-opened window, which was letting in the cold night air. As I did so I shivered, noting how ugly and shapeless the mangle looked in the yard, with the moonlight on its frosty cover.

The fellow was standing abjectly in the same place. He had evidently been rickety as a child. I sat down in the rocking-chair.

'What did you come in here for?' I asked, almost pleading.

'Well,' he retorted insolently. 'An' wouldn't you go somewhere if you 'edn't a place to go to of a night like this?'

'Look here,' I said coldly, a flash of hate in my blood; 'None of your chelp.'

'Well, I only come in for a warm,' he said, afraid not to appear defiant.

'No you didn't,' I replied. 'You came to take something. What did you want from here?' I looked round the kitchen unhappily. He looked back at me uneasily, then at his dirty hands, then at me again. He had brown eyes, in which low cunning floated like oil on the top of much misery.

'I might 'a took some boots' he said, with a little vaunt.

My heart sank. I hoped he would say 'food'. And I was responsible for him. I hated him.

'You want your neck breaking,' I said. 'We can hardly afford boots as it is.'

'I ain't never done it before! This is the first time -'

'You miserable swine!' I said. He looked at me with a flash of rat-fury.

'Where do you live?' I asked.

'Exeter Road.'

'And you don't do any work?'

'I couldn't never get a job - except - I used to deliver laundry -'

'And they turned you off for thieving?'

He shifted and stirred uneasily in his chair. As he was so manifestly uncomfortable, I did not press him.

'Who do you live with?'

'I live at 'ome.'

'What does your father do?'

But he sat stubborn and would not answer. I thought of the gangs of youths who stood at the corner of the mean streets near the school, there all day long, month after month, fooling with the laundry girls and insulting passers-by.

'But,' I said, 'what are you going to do?'

He hung his head again and fidgeted in his chair. Evidently what little thought he gave to the subject made him uncomfortable. He could not answer.

'Get a laundry girl to marry you and live on her?' I asked sarcastically.

He smiled sickly, evidently even a little bit flattered. What was the good of talking to him?

'And loaf at the street corners till you go rotten?' I said.

He looked up at me sullenly.

'Well, I can't get a job,' he replied with insolence. He was not hopeless, but like a man born without expectations, apathetic, looking to be provided for, sullenly allowing everything.

'No,' I said, 'if a man is worthy of his hire, the hire is worthy of a man - and I'm damned if you *are* a man!'

He grinned at me with sly insolence.

'And would any woman have you?' I asked.

Then he grinned slyly to himself, ducking his head to hide the joke. And I thought of the coloured primroses and of Muriel's beautiful, pensive face. Then of him with his dirty clothes and his nasty skin! Then that, given a woman, he would be a father.

'Well,' I said, 'it's a knock-out.'

He gave me a narrow, sleering look.

'You don't know everything,' he said in contempt.

I sat and wondered. And I knew I could not understand

him, that I had no fellow feeling with him. He was something beyond me.

‘Well,’ I said helplessly, ‘you’d better go.’

I rose, feeling he had beaten me. He could affect and alter me: I could not affect nor alter him. He shambled off down the path. I watched him skulk under the lamp-posts, afraid of the police. Then I shut the door.

In the silence of the sleeping house I stood quite still for some minutes, up against the impassable fact of this man, beyond which I could not get. I could not accept him. I simply hated him. Then I climbed the stairs. It was like a nightmare. I thought he was a blot, like a blot fallen on my mind, something black and heavy out of which I could not extricate myself.

As I hung up my coat I felt Muriel’s fat letter in my pocket. It made me a trifle sick. ‘No!’ I said, with a flush of rage against her perfect, serene purity, ‘I don’t want to think of her.’ And I wound my watch up sullenly, feeling alone and wretched.

## *Mercury*

It was Sunday, and very hot. The holiday-makers flocked to the hill of Mercury, to rise two thousand feet above the steamy haze of the valleys. For the summer had been very wet, and the sudden heat covered the land in hot steam.

Every time it made the ascent, the funicular was crowded. It hauled itself up the steep incline, that towards the top looked almost perpendicular, the steel thread of the rails in the gulf of pine-trees hanging like an iron rope against a wall. The women held their breath, and didn't look. Or they looked back towards the sinking levels of the river, steamed and dim, far-stretching over the frontier.

When you arrived at the top, there was nothing to do. The hill was a pine-covered cone; paths wound between the high tree-trunks, and you could walk round and see the glimpses of the world all round, all round: the dim, far river-plain, with a dull glint of the great stream, to westwards; southwards the black, forest-covered, agile-looking hills, with emerald-green clearings and a white house or two; east, the inner valley, with two villages, factory chimneys, pointed churches, and hills beyond; and north, the steep hills of forest, with reddish crags and reddish castle ruins. The hot sun burned overhead, and all was in steam.

Only on the very summit of the hill there was a tower, an outlook tower; a long restaurant with its beer-garden, all the little yellow tables standing their round disks under the horse-chestnut trees; then a bit of a rock-garden on the slope. But the great trees began again in wilderness a few yards off.

The Sunday crowd came up in waves from the funicular.

In waves they ebbed through the beer-garden. But not many sat down to drink. Nobody was spending any money. Some paid to go up the outlook tower, to look down on a world of vapours and black, agile-crouching hills, and half-cooked towns. Then everybody dispersed along the paths, to sit among the trees in the cool air.

There was not a breath of wind. Lying and looking upwards at the shaggy, barbaric middle-world of the pine trees, it was difficult to decide whether the pure high trunks supported the upper thicket of darkness, or whether they descended from it like great cords stretched downwards. Anyhow, in between the tree-top world and the earth-world went the wonderful clean cords of innumerable proud tree-trunks, clear as rain. And as you watched, you saw that the upper world was faintly moving, faintly, most faintly swaying, with a circular movement, though the lower trunks were utterly motionless and monolithic.

There was nothing to do. In all the world, there was nothing to do, and nothing to be done. Why have we all come to the top of the Merkur? There is nothing for us to do.

What matter? We have come a stride beyond the world. Let it steam and cook its half-baked reality below there. On the hill of Mercury we take no notice. Even we do not trouble to wander and pick the fat, blue, sourish bilberries. Just lie and see the rain-pure tree-trunks like chords of music between two worlds.

The hours pass by: people wander and disappear and reappear. All is hot and quiet. Humanity is rarely boisterous any more. You go for a drink: finches run among the few people at the tables: everybody glances at everybody, but with remoteness.

There is nothing to do but to return and lie down under the pine trees. Nothing to do. But why do anything, any-

## MERCURY

how? The desire to do anything has gone. The tree-trunks, living like rain, they are quite active enough.

At the foot of the obsolete tower there is an old tablet-stone with a very much battered Mercury, in relief. There is also an altar, or votive stone, both from the Roman times. The Romans are supposed to have worshipped Mercury on the summit. The battered god, with his round sun-head, looks very hollow-eyed and unimpressive in the purplish-red sandstone of the district. And no one any more will throw grains of offering in the hollow of the votive stone: also common, purplish-red sandstone, very local and un-Roman.

The Sunday people do not even look. Why should they? They keep passing on into the pine trees. And many sit on the benches; many lie upon the long chairs. It is very hot, in the afternoon, and very still.

Till there seems a faint whistling in the tops of the pine trees, and out of the universal semi-consciousness of the afternoon arouses a bristling uneasiness. The crowd is astir, looking at the sky. And sure enough, there is a great flat blackness reared up in the western sky, curled with white wisps and loose breast-feathers. It looks very sinister, as only the elements still can look. Under the sudden weird whistling of the upper pine trees, there is a subdued babble and calling of frightened voices.

They want to get down; the crowd want to get down off the hill of Mercury, before the storm comes. At any price to get off the hill! They stream towards the funicular, while the sky blackens with incredible rapidity. And as the crowd presses down towards the little station, the first blaze of lightning opens out, followed immediately by a crash of thunder, and great darkness. In one strange movement, the crowd takes refuge in the deep veranda of the restaurant, pressing among the little tables in silence. There is no

rain, and no definite wind, only a sudden coldness which makes the crowd press closer.

They press closer, in the darkness and the suspense. They have become curiously unified, the crowd, as if they had fused into one body. As the air sends a chill waft under the veranda the voices murmur plaintively, like birds under leaves, the bodies press closer together, seeking shelter in contact.

The gloom, dark as night, seems to continue a long time. Then suddenly the lightning dances white on the floor, dances and shakes upon the ground, up and down, and lights up the white striding of a man, lights him up only to the hips, white and naked and striding, with fire on his heels. He seems to be hurrying, this fiery man whose upper half is invisible, and at his naked heels white little flames seem to flutter. His flat, powerful thighs, his legs white as fire stride rapidly across the open, in front of the veranda, dragging little white flames at the ankles, with the movement. He is going somewhere, swiftly.

In the great bang of the thunder the apparition disappears. The earth moves, and the house jumps in complete darkness. A faint whimpering of terror comes from the crowd, as the cold air swirls in. But still, upon the darkness, there is no rain. There is no relief: a long wait.

Brilliant and blinding, the lightning falls again; a strange bruising thud comes from the forest, as all the little tables and the secret tree-trunks stand for one unnatural second exposed. Then the blow of the thunder, under which the house and the crowd reel as under an explosion. The storm is playing directly upon the Merkur. A belated sound of tearing branches comes out of the forest.

And again the white splash of the lightning on the ground: but nothing moves. And again the long, rattling, instantaneous volleying of the thunder, in the darkness.



The crowd is panting with fear, as the lightning again strikes white, and something again seems to burst, in the forest, as the thunder crashes.

At last, into the motionlessness of the storm, in rushes the wind, with the fiery flying of bits of ice, and the sudden sea-like roaring of the pine trees. The crowd winces and draws back, as the bits of ice hit in the face like fire. The roar of the trees is so great, it becomes like another silence. And through it is heard the crashing and splintering of timber, as the hurricane concentrates upon the hill.

Down comes the hail, in a roar that covers every other sound, threshing ponderously upon the ground and the roofs and the trees. And as the crowd surges irresistibly into the interior of the building, from the crushing of this ice-fall, still amid the sombre hoarseness sounds the tinkle and crackle of things breaking.

After an eternity of dread, it ends suddenly. Outside is a faint gleam of yellow light, over the snow and the endless debris of twigs and things broken. It is very cold, with the atmosphere of ice and deep winter. The forest looks wan, above the white earth, where the ice-balls lie in their myriads, six inches deep, littered with all the twigs and things they have broken.

‘Yes! Yes!’ say the men, taking sudden courage as the yellow light comes into the air. ‘Now we can go!’

The first brave ones emerge, picking up the big hail-stones, pointing to the overthrown tables. Some, however, do not linger. They hurry to the funicular station, to see if the apparatus is still working.

The funicular station is on the north side of the hill. The men come back, saying there is no one there. The crowd begins to emerge upon the wet, crunching whiteness of the hail, spreading around in curiosity, waiting for the men who operate the funicular.

On the south side of the outlook tower two bodies lay in the cold but thawing hail. The dark-blue of the uniforms showed blackish. Both men were dead. But the lightning had completely removed the clothing from the legs of one man, so that he was naked from the hips down. There he lay, his face sideways on the snow, and two drops of blood running from his nose into his big, blond, military moustache. He lay there near the votive stone of the Mercury. His companion, a young man, lay face downwards, a few yards behind him.

The sun began to emerge. The crowd gazed in dread, afraid to touch the bodies of the men. Why had they, the dead funicular men, come round to this side of the hill, anyhow?

The funicular would not work. Something had happened to it in the storm. The crowd began to wind down the bare hill, on the sloppy ice. Everywhere the earth bristled with broken pine boughs and twigs. But the bushes and the leafy trees were stripped absolutely bare, to a miracle. The lower earth was leafless and naked as in winter.

‘Absolute winter!’ murmured the crowd, as they hurried, frightened, down the steep, winding descent, extricating themselves from the fallen pine-branches.

Meanwhile the sun began to steam in great heat.

## *The Man Who Was Through with the World*

THERE was a man not long ago, who felt he was through with the world, so he decided to be a hermit. He had a little money, and he knew that nowadays there are no hermitages going rent-free. So he bought a bit of wild land on a mountain-side, with a few chestnut trees growing on it. He waited till spring; then went up and started building himself a little cabin, with the stones from the hillside. By summer, he had got himself a nice little hut with a chimney and one little window, a table, a chair, a bed, and the smallest number of things a hermit may need. Then he considered himself set up as a hermit.

His hermitage stood in a sheltered nook in the rocks of the mountain, and through the open door he looked out on the big, staggering chestnut trees of the upper region. These trees, this bit of property was his legal own, but he wanted to dedicate it to somebody: to God, preferably.

He felt, however, a bit vague about God. In his youth he had been sent to Sunday School, but he had long been through with all that. He had, as a matter of fact, even forgotten the Lord's Prayer, like the old man in the Tolstoi parable. If he tried to remember it, he mixed it up with The Lord is my Shepherd, and felt annoyed. He might, of course, have fetched himself a Bible. But he was through with all that.

Because, before he was through with everything, he had read quite a lot about Brahma and Krishna and Shiva, and Buddha and Confucius and Mithras—not to mention Zeus and Aphrodite and that bunch, nor the Wotan family. So when he began to think: The Lord is my Shepherd, some-

how Shiva would start dancing a Charleston in the back of his mind, and Mithras would take the bull by the horns, and Mohammed would start patting the buttery flanks of Ayesha, and Abraham would be sitting down to a good meal off a fat ram, till the grease ran down his beard. So that it was very difficult to concentrate on God with a large 'g', and the hermit had a natural reluctance to go into refinements of the great I Am, or of thatness. He wanted to get away from all that sort of thing. For what else had he become a hermit?

But alas, he found it wasn't so easy. If you're a hermit, you've got to concentrate. You've got to sit in the door of your hut in the sunshine, and concentrate on something holy. This hermit would sit in the door of his hut in the sunshine right enough, but he couldn't find anything holy enough really to keep him concentrated. If he tried some nice Eastern mode of meditation, and sat cross-legged with a faint lotus-like smile on his face, some dog-in-the-manger inside him growled: Oh, cut it out, Henry, Nirvana's a cold egg for the likes of you.

So gradually the hermit became desperate. There he was, all rigged up quite perfect as a holy man, a hermit, and an anchorite, and he felt like an acrobat trying to hang on to a tight wire with his eyebrows. He simply had nothing to hold on to. There wasn't a single holiness or high-and-mightiness that interested him enough to bring concentration. And a hermit with nothing to concentrate on is like a fly in the cream jug.

Spring changed into summer. The primroses by the little stream where the hermit dipped his water faded and were gone, only their large leaves spread to the hotter days. The violets flickered to a finish; at last not a purple spark was left. The chestnut burrs upon the ground finally had melted away, the leaves overhead had emerged and over-

the sun, not meditating, not even musing, just being stubborn, and getting browned to a beautiful gold-brown colour. He did not mind so much, while the sun shone, and he could stroll nude through the trees, or sit out in the glow or in the shade. Then he didn't mind not being able to meditate nor to concentrate, and not having any holiness to bless himself with. The sun on his body seemed to do all the meditating and concentrating he needed. His limbs were thin, and golden brown, and his thin body was as brown as his face. He was, like the savage in the story, 'face all over'.

'I am face all over,' he thought to himself, with a smile.

The strings of the chestnut flowers had fallen, the fruits set and grew big, of a clear green colour, and fuzzy. The hermit had to decide whether he would stay on after the chestnuts had come down, when the snow would fall and the mountains lapse into isolation. He was still hanging on to solitude by his eye-brows, and nothing holy had turned up for him to concentrate on.

But he was getting used to the condition. And the very fact that he was alone, that no people came near him, was a source of positive satisfaction. He decided he would stay on all winter.

This, however, meant getting in certain supplies for the cold months, and especially boots and clothing and bedding, for he had no mind to mortify the flesh by shivering with cold. The snow would lie round his cabin, and the icy wind would whistle through his chestnut trees in huge blasts. Prepare for the wrath to come.

So he put on his decent suit of clothes, clipped his beard a little, descended, took the post-omnibus and then the train, and found himself in the city. His chief feeling was that everything smelled unpleasantly, that the noise was hellish, and that people had terrible and repulsive faces;

and that everywhere was a rancid odour of money, a terrible over-smell that reeked from everything animate and inanimate.

He bought his necessities with disgust, hurrying to get it over. Everybody stared at him as if he were a cameleopard, and he knew the police wanted to arrest him at sight. He had to spend the night in town, so he stayed at the big hotel near the station. And he fixed the clerk with a cold and haughty eye, and spoke in his coldest, calmly arrogant voice, knowing that if he were for one moment modest or uncertain, the worm behind the desk would deny him a room.

As it was, he had to put up with an inner bedroom, beside the lift. But at dawn, he left the place, having settled his bill the night before, and getting all his bundles into a carriage, drove across to the station. The porter who helped him eyed him with the usual insolent stare, and took his tip and dodged away with the air of a contemptuous human being who has just about had enough of attending to animals in a menagerie.

The hermit, for his part, hired a donkey at the village, piled his goods upon it, and shook the stink of his fellow-men out of his clothing. Never had he been so glad to climb through the trees. Never had anything looked so nice as his stone hut with its barrel roof, the first yellow leaves of the chestnuts dropping around it, and the rosy little cyclamens in the moss just near the door.

It was a warm afternoon. He hastily took off his clothing and put it in the sun, to remove the taint of the city and the train. He went down to his pool to wash himself, and stayed naked in the sun till sunset, to clear himself from the pollution of people.

There followed a busy period. He gathered the chestnuts scrupulously as they fell, piling them in a heap near the

door, then carefully getting them from their burrs, and spreading the bright nuts on his small roof. He built a lean-to against his little house, and stacked his wood there, that he cut in the forest. Also he began to collect the big pine-cones that have pine-kernels inside them: though for these it was as yet full early.

Already the mornings and evenings were touched with ice. He emerged in the morning in warm woollen clothing, which he peeled off as the sun rose, and at last went about in his own brown skin. But many days were cold, and many were rainy, and he had to remain covered up.

Then he was never happy. He found, the more clothing he had to wear, the more he was restless and needed to think, needed some sort of salvation; and on the other hand, the more he could go naked in the sun, the less he went in need of any salvation. So while he could, he went about stark, and gradually he grew tougher. But as winter and the snow-winds swept the mountains, he could less and less afford to lose his bodily heat, by exposing himself.

In the days of cold rain, he did his chores in his hut, and made himself bread, and cooked pies, and mended his clothes.

*(Unfinished)*

## *The Wilful Woman*

NOVEMBER of the year 1916. A woman travelling from New York to the South West, by one of the tourist trains. On the third day the train lost time more and more. She raged with painful impatience. No good, at every station the train sat longer. They had passed the prairie lands and entered the mountain and desert region. They ought soon to arrive, soon. This was already the desert of grey-white sage and blue mountains. She ought to be there, soon, soon she ought to be there. This journey alone should be over. But the train comfortably stretched its length in the stations, and would never arrive. There was no end. It could not arrive. She could not bear it.

The woman sat in that cubby-hole at the end of the Pullman which is called in America a Drawing-Room. She had the place to herself and her bags. Volts of distracted impatience and heart-brokenness surged out of her, so that the negro did not dare to come in and sweep her floor with his little brush and dustpan. He left the 'Room' unswept for the afternoon.

Frustration and a painful volcanic pressure of impatience. The train would not arrive, *could* not arrive. That was it.

She was a sturdy woman with a round face, like an obstinate girl of fourteen. Like an obstinate girl of fourteen she sat there devouring her unease, her heavy, muscular fore-arms inert in her lap. So still, yet at such a pressure. So child-like – yet a woman approaching forty. So naïve-looking, softly full and feminine. And curiously heart-broken at being alone, travelling alone. Of course any man might have rushed to save her, and reap the reward of her



soft, heavy, grateful magnetism. But wait a bit. Her thick, dark brows like curved horns over the naïve-looking face; and her bright, hazel-grey eyes, clear at the first glance as candour and unquenchable youth, at the second glance made up all of devilish grey and yellow bits, as opals are, and the bright candour of youth resolving into something dangerous as the headlights of a great machine coming full at you in the night. Mr Hercules had better think twice before he rushed to pick up this seductive serpent of loneliness that lay on the western trail. He had picked a snake up long ago, without hurting himself. But that was before Columbus discovered America.

Why did she feel that the train would never arrive, *could* never arrive, with her in it. Who knows? But that was how she did feel. The train would never arrive. Simple fate. Perhaps she felt that some power of her will would at last neutralize altogether the power of the engines, and there would come an end to motion, so there they would sit, forever, the train and she, at a deadlock on the Santa Fe Line. She had left New York in a sort of frenzy. Since they had passed Kansas City, Gate of the West, the thing had been getting unbearable. Since they had passed La Junta and come to the desert and the Rockies, the fatality had as good as happened. Yet she was only a few hours from her destination. And she would never get there. This train would never bring her there. Her head was one mass of thoughts and frenzied ideas almost to madness.

Then she sprang out of her Pullman. It was somewhere after Trinidad, she didn't bother where. 'Put my bags out,' she said to the negro, and he, looking at those serpent-blazing eyes under those eyebrows like thorn bushes, silently obeyed. Yet with her mouth she smiled a little and was cajoling, and his tip was reckless. Man must needs be mollified. She remembered to be just sufficiently soft

and feminine. But she was distracted and heart-broken.

Started her next whirl. She must have an automobile, she *would* have an automobile, to be driven this hundred or hundred and fifty miles that remained. Yes, she would have an automobile. But she had got out at a station where, at least that afternoon, there *was* no automobile. Nevertheless, she *would* have an automobile. So at last was produced an old worn-out Dodge with no springs left, belonging to a boy of sixteen. Yes, she would have that. The boy had never travelled that trail, didn't know the way. No matter, she would go. She would get to Lamy in front of that hateful train which she had left. And the boy would get twenty-six dollars. Good enough!

She had never been west before, so she reckoned without her host. She had still to learn what trails round the Rockies and across the desert are like. She imagined roads, or forest tracks. She found what actually is a trail in the south west – a blind squirm up sand-banks, a blind rattle along dry river-beds, a breathless scramble in deep cañons over what look like simple landslides and precipices, the car at an angle of forty-five degrees above a green rocky river, banging itself to bits against boulders, surging through the river then back again through the river and once more swooping through the river with the devil's own scramble up a rocky bank on the other side, and a young boy driving on, driving ahead, without knowing where, or what was happening to him, twenty-six dollars at the end. So out on the lurch and bump of the open white-sage desert once more, to follow the trail by scent rather than by sight, cart-ruts this way, tracks that way, please yourself in the god-forsaken landscape, bolting into a slope of piñon and cedar, dark-green bush-scrub, then dropping down to a wire fence and a gate, a sort of ranch, and a lost village of houses like brown mud boxes plonked down in the grey

wilderness, with a bigger mud box, oblong, which the boy told her was the sort of church place where the Penitentes scourge and torture themselves, windowless so that no one shall hear their shrieks and groans.

By nightfall she had had a lot of the nonsense bumped and bruised out of her, knocked about as if she were a penitente herself. Not that she was a *penitente*: not she. But at least here was a country that hit her with hard knuckles, right through to the bone. It was something of a country.

Luckily, she had telegraphed to Mark, who would be waiting for her at Lamy station. Mark was her husband — her third. One dead, one divorced, and Mark alternately torn to atoms and thrown to the four corners of the universe, then rather sketchily gathered up and put together again by a desirous, if still desperate Isis. She had torn him in two and pitched him piecemeal away into the southwestern desert. Now she was after him once more, going to put humpty-dumpty together again with a slam. With a slam that might finally do for him.

Of course he is an artist, a foreigner, a Russian. Of course she is an American woman, several generations of wealth and tradition in various cities of New York state behind her, several generations of visiting Europe and staying in the Meurice and seeing Napoleon III or Gambetta or whoever was figuring on the stage of Paris. She herself had stayed in the old Meurice. She too had had her apartment in a fine old hotel, and if there was no Napoleon III left for her, there had been ex-Princesses of Saxony, d'Annunzio, Duse, Isadora Duncan or Matisse.

These American families do actually tend to cumulate and culminate in one daughter. Not that the family had as yet cumulated in Sybil Mond. She had started as Sybil Hamnett, and had been successively Sybil Thomas and

Sybil Danks before she married the Jewish artist from somewhere Poland way, who was, in her family's eyes, the anti-climax. But she herself admitted no possibility of anti-climax for herself, and kept unpleasant surprises still in store for her family. Her family being her mother and the General, Sybil's second step-father. For she was as well-off for step-fathers as for husbands.

The family had actually culminated in Sybil: all the force of the Hamnetts, on her father's side, and the push of the Wilcoxes, on her mother's, focused into this one highly-explosive daughter. No question of dribbling out. Sybil at forty was heavy with energy like a small bison, and strong and young-looking as if she were thirty, often giving the impression of soft crudeness as if she were sixteen. The old colonial vigour had, we repeat, collected in her as in some final dam, like the buffalo's force in his forehead. But the old colonial riches had not yet descended upon her. She had her own sufficient income, but the mass of the family wealth rested on her mother, who, aided by the General, exemplified it in the correct and magnificent Italian Mansion on Lake Erie.

The rackety machine in which she rode had of course no headlights, and the November night fell. The boy hadn't thought to put the lamps on. No headlights! Frustration, always frustration. Sybil annihilated the boy in her soul, and sat still. Or rather, with her body lashed and bruised, her soul sat crying and ominous. There was nothing to be done but to scramble for the nearest station again.

On then, under the many sharp, small stars of the desert. The air was cold in her nostrils, the desert seemed weird and uncanny. But – it was terra nova. It was a new world, the desert at the foot of the mountains, the high desert above the gorges of the cañons, the world of three altitudes. Strange! – doomful!

Yes, destiny had made her get out of the train and into this rickety machine. Destiny even had made the boy bring no headlights. Her ponderous storm began to evaporate. She looked round the night as they emerged from a dark cañon out onto a high flat bit of vague desert, with mountains guarding the flatness beyond, shadows beyond the shadows.

It impressed her, although she *must* get to her journey end, she *must* arrive. No, it was not like desert. Rather like wilderness, the wilderness of the temptation, for example. Shadowy scrub of pale grey sage, knee-high, waist-high, on the flat of the table land; and on the slopes of the mountains that rose still further, starting off the flat table, scrub of gnarled pine and cedar, still hardly more than bushes, but like those Japanese dwarf-trees, full of age, torture and power. Strange country – weird – frightening too. It would need a battle to gain hold over such a land. It would need a battle. She snuffed the curiously-scented air of the desert. With her tongue almost jerked out of her mouth by the jumping of the car, she sat inwardly motionless, facing destiny again. It was her destiny she should come to this land. It was her destiny she should see it for the first time thus, alone, lost, without light. That was destiny, that threw her naked like the black queen onto this unknown chess-board. She hugged her furs and her fate round her, in the cold, rare air, and was somewhat relieved. Her battle! Her hope!

And thus by eight o'clock the frozen, disappointed, but dogged boy brought her to the railway again, as she bade him. It was impossible for him to get her to Lamy without lights or anything. He must forfeit some of the twenty-six dollars. He was disappointed, but he admitted the truth of her contention.

Wagon-Mound, or some such name. She remembered a

## THE WILFUL WOMAN

sort of dome of a hill in the night. After which nothing to be done but to go to the 'hotel', to wait three hours for the slow train which followed the one she had abandoned way back at Trinidad.

*(Unfinished)*

## *The Flying Fish*

### *I Departure from Mexico*

'COME home else no Day in Daybrook.' This cablegram was the first thing Gethin Day read of the pile of mail which he found at the hotel in the lost town of South Mexico, when he returned from his trip to the coast. Though the message was not signed, he knew whom it came from and what it meant.

He lay in his bed in the hot October evening, still sick with malaria. In the flush of fever he saw yet the parched, stark mountains of the south, the villages of reed huts lurking among trees, the black-eyed natives with the lethargy, the ennui, the pathos, the beauty of an exhausted race; and above all he saw the weird, uncanny flowers, which he had hunted from the high plateaux, through the valleys, and down to the steaming crocodile heat of the *tierra caliente*, towards the sandy, burning, intolerable shores. For he was fascinated by the mysterious green blood that runs in the veins of plants, and the purple and yellow and red blood that colours the faces of flowers. Especially the unknown flora of South Mexico attracted him, and above all he wanted to trace to the living plant the mysterious essences and toxins known with such strange elaboration to the Mayas, the Zapotecas, and the Aztecs.

His head was humming like a mosquito, his legs were paralysed for the moment by the heavy quinine injection the doctor had injected into them, and his soul was as good as dead with the malaria; so he threw all his letters unopened on the floor, hoping never to see them again. He

## THE FLYING FISII

lay with the pale yellow cablegram in his hand: 'Come home else no Day in Daybrook.' Through the open doors from the patio of the hotel came the heavy scent of that invisible green night-flower the natives call *Buena de Noche*. The little Mexican servant-girl strode in barefoot with a cup of tea, her flounced cotton skirt swinging, her long black hair down her back. She asked him in her birdlike Spanish if he wanted nothing more. '*Nada más*,' he said. 'Nothing more; leave me and shut the door.'

He wanted to shut out the scent of that powerful green inconspicuous night-flower he knew so well.

No Day in Daybrook;  
For the Vale a bad outlook.

No Day in Daybrook! There had been Days in Daybrook since time began: at least, so he imagined.

Daybrook was a sixteenth-century stone house, among the hills in the middle of England. It stood where Crichdale bends to the south and where Ashleydale joins in. 'Daybrook standeth at the junction of the ways and at the centre of the trefoil. Even it rides within the Vale as an ark between three seas; being indeed the ark of these vales, if not of all England.' So had written Sir Gilbert Day, he who built the present Daybrook in the sixteenth century. Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*, so beautifully written out on vellum and illuminated by his own hand, was one of the treasures of the family.

Sir Gilbert had sailed the Spanish seas in his day, and had come home rich enough to rebuild the old house of Daybrook according to his own fancy. He had made it a beautiful pointed house, rather small, standing upon a knoll above the river Ashe, where the valley narrowed and the woods rose steep behind. 'Nay,' wrote this quaint Elizabethan, 'though I say that Daybrook is the ark of the



Vale, I mean not the house itself, but He that Day, that lives in the house in his day. While Day there be in Daybrook, the floods shall not cover the Vale nor shall they ride over England completely.'

Gethin Day was nearing forty, and he had not spent much of his time in Daybrook. He had been a soldier and had wandered in many countries. At home his sister Lydia, twenty years older than himself, had been the Day in Daybrook. Now from her cablegram he knew she was either ill or already dead.

She had been rather hard and grey like the rock of Crichdale, but faithful and a pillar of strength. She had let him go his own way, but always when he came home, she would look into his blue eyes with her searching uncanny grey look and ask: 'Well, have you come, or are you still wandering?' 'Still wandering, I think,' he said. 'Mind you don't wander into a cage one of these days,' she replied; 'you would find far more room for yourself in Daybrook than in these foreign parts, if you knew how to come into your own.'

This had always been the burden of her song to him: *if you knew how to come into your own*. And it had always exasperated him with a sense of futility; though whether his own futility or Lydia's, he had never made out.

Lydia was wrapt up in old Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*; she had written out for her brother a fair copy, neatly bound in green leather, and had given it him without a word when he came of age, merely looking at him with that uncanny look of her grey eyes, expecting something of him, which always made him start away from her.

The *Book of Days* was a sort of secret family bible at Daybrook. It was never shown to strangers, nor ever mentioned outside the immediate family. Indeed in the family it was never openly alluded to. Only on solemn occasions,

## THE FLYING FISH

or on rare evenings, at twilight, when the evening star shone, had the father, now dead, occasionally read aloud to the two children from the nameless work.

In the copy she had written out for Gethin, Lydia had used different coloured inks in different places. Gethin imagined that her favourite passages were those in the royal-blue ink, where the page was almost as blue as the cornflowers that grew tall beside the walks in the garden at Daybrook.

‘Beauteous is the day of the yellow sun which is the common day of men; but even as the winds roll unceasing above the trees of the world, so doth that Greater Day, which is the Uncommon Day, roll over the unclipt bushes of our little daytime. Even also as the morning sun shakes his yellow wings on the horizon and rises up, so the great bird beyond him spreads out his dark blue feathers, and beats his wings in the tremor of the Greater Day.’

Gethin knew a great deal of his *Book of Days* by heart. In a dilettante fashion, he had always liked rather highflown poetry, but in the last years, something in the hard, fierce, finite sun of Mexico, in the dry terrible land, and in the black staring eyes of the suspicious natives, had made the ordinary day lose its reality to him. It had cracked like some great bubble, and to his uneasiness and terror, he had seemed to see through the fissures the deeper blue of that other Greater Day where moved the other sun shaking its dark blue wings. Perhaps it was the malaria; perhaps it was his own inevitable development; perhaps it was the presence of those handsome, dangerous, wide-eyed men left over from the ages before the flood in Mexico, which caused his old connections and his accustomed world to break for him. He was ill, and he felt as if at the very middle of him, beneath his navel, some membrane were torn, some membrane which had connected him with the world

and its day. The natives who attended him, quiet, soft, heavy, and rather helpless, seemed, he realized, to be gazing from their wide black eyes always into that greater day whence they had come and where they wished to return. Men of a dying race, to whom the busy sphere of the common day is a cracked and leaking shell.

He wanted to go home. He didn't care now whether England was tight and little and over-crowded and far too full of furniture. He no longer minded the curious quiet atmosphere of Daybrook in which he had felt he would stifle as a young man. He no longer resented the weight of family tradition, nor the peculiar sense of authority which the house seemed to have over him. Now he was sick from the soul outwards, and the common day had cracked for him, and the uncommon day was showing him its immensity, he felt that home was the place. It did not matter that England was small and tight and over-furnished, if the Greater Day were round about. He wanted to go home, away from these big wild countries where men were dying back into the Greater Day, home where he dare face the sun behind the sun, and come into his own in the Greater Day.

But he was as yet too ill to go. He lay in the nausea of the tropics, and let the days pass over him. The door of his room stood open on to the patio where green banana trees and high strange-sapped flowering shrubs rose from the water-sprinkled earth towards that strange rage of blue which was the sky over the shadow-heavy, perfume-soggy air of the closed-in courtyard. Dark-blue shadows moved from the side of the patio, disappeared, then appeared on the other side. Evening had come, and the barefoot natives in white calico flitted with silent rapidity across, and across, for ever going, yet mysteriously going nowhere, threading the timelessness with their transit, like swallows of darkness.

## THE FLYING FISH

The window of the room, opposite the door, opened on to the tropical parched street. It was a big window, came nearly down to the floor, and was heavily barred with upright and horizontal bars. Past the window went the natives, with the soft, light rustle of their sandals. Big straw hats balanced, dark cheeks, calico shoulders brushed with the silent swiftness of the Indian past the barred window-space. Sometimes children clutched the bars and gazed in, with great shining eyes and straight blue-black hair, to see the Americano lying in the majesty of a white bed. Sometimes a beggar stood there, sticking a skinny hand through the iron grille and whimpering the strange, endless, pullulating whimper of the beggar – ‘*por amor de Dios!*’ – on and on and on, as it seemed for an eternity. But the sick man on the bed endured it with the same endless endurance in resistance, endurance in resistance which he had learned in the Indian countries. Aztec or Mixtec, Zapotec or Maya, always the same power of serpent-like torpor of resistance.

The doctor came – an educated Indian: though he could do nothing but inject quinine and give a dose of calomel. But he was lost between the two days, the fatal greater day of the Indians, the fussy, busy lesser day of the white people.

‘How is it going to finish?’ he said to the sick man, seeking a word. ‘How is it going to finish with the Indians, with the Mexicans? Now the soldiers are all taking *marihuana* – hashish!’

‘They are all going to die. They are all going to kill themselves – all – all,’ said the Englishman, in the faint permanent delirium of his malaria. ‘After all, beautiful it is to be dead, and quite departed.’

The doctor looked at him in silence, understanding only too well. ‘Beautiful it is to be dead!’ It is the refrain which

hums at the centre of every Indian heart, where the greater day is hemmed in by the lesser. The despair that comes when the lesser day hems in the greater. Yet the doctor looked at the gaunt white man in malice: – ‘What, would you have us quite gone, you Americans?’

At last, Gethin Day crawled out into the plaza. The square was like a great low fountain of green and of dark shade, now it was autumn and the rains were over. Scarlet craters rose the canna flowers, licking great red tongues, and tropical yellow. Scarlet, yellow, green, blue-green, sunshine intense and invisible, deep indigo shade! and small, white-clad natives pass, passing, across the square, through the green lawns, under the indigo shade, and across the hollow sunshine of the road into the arched arcades of the low Spanish buildings, where the shops were. The low, baroque Spanish buildings stood back with a heavy, sick look, as if they too felt the endless malaria in their bowels, the greater day of the stony Indian crushing the more jaunty, lean European day which they represented. The yellow cathedral leaned its squat, earthquake-shaken towers, the bells sounded hollow. Earth-coloured tiny soldiers lay and stood around the entrance to the municipal palace, which was so baroque and Spanish, but which now belonged to the natives. Heavy as a strange bell of shadow-coloured glass, the shadow of the greater day hung over this coloured plaza which the Europeans had created, like an oasis, in the lost depths of Mexico: Gethin Day sat half lying on one of the broken benches, while tropical birds flew and twittered in the great trees, and natives twittered or fitted in silence, and he knew that here, the European day was annulled again. His body was sick with the poison that lurks in all tropical air, his soul was sick with that other day, that rather awful greater day which permeates the little days of the old races. He wanted

## THE FLYING FISH

to get out, to get out of this ghastly tropical void into which he had fallen.

Yet it was the end of November before he could go. Little revolutions had again broken the thread of railway at the end of which the southern town hung revolving like a spider. It was a narrow-gauge railway, one single narrow little track which ran over the plateau, then slipped down, down the long *barranca*, descending five thousand feet down to the valley which was a cleft in the plateau, then up again seven thousand feet, to the higher plateau to the north. How easy to break the thread! One of the innumerable little wooden bridges destroyed, and it was done. The three hundred miles to the north were impassable wilderness, like the hundred and fifty miles through the low-lying jungle to the south.

At last however he could crawl away. The train came again. He had cabled to England, and had received the answer that his sister was dead. It seemed so natural, there under the powerful November sun of southern Mexico, in the drugging powerful odours of the night-flowers, that Lydia should be dead. She seemed so much more *real*, shall we say actually vital, in death. Dead, he could think of her as quite near and comforting and real, whereas while she was alive, she was so utterly alien, remote and fussy, ghost-like in her petty Derbyshire day.

'For the little day is like a house with the family round the hearth, and the door shut. Yet outside whispers the Greater Day, wall-less, and hearthless. And the time will come at last when the walls of the little day shall fall, and what is left of the family of men shall find themselves outdoors in the Greater Day, houseless and abroad, even here between the knees of the Vales, even in Crichdale. It is a doom that will come upon tall men. And then they will breathe deep, and be breathless in the great air, and salt

sweat will stand on their brow, thick as buds on sloe-bushes when the sun comes back. And little men will shudder and die out, like clouds of grasshoppers falling in the sea. Then tall men will remain alone in the land, moving deeper in the Greater Day, and moving deeper. Even as the flying fish, when he leaves the air and recovereth his element in the depth, plunges and invisibly rejoices. So will tall men rejoice, after their flight of fear, through the thin air, pursued by death. For it is on wings of fear, sped from the mouth of death, that the flying fish riseth twinkling in the air, and rustles in astonishment silvery through the thin small day. But he dives again into the great peace of the deeper day, and under the belly of death, and passes into his own.'

Gethin read again his *Book of Days*, in the twilight of his last evening. Personally, he resented the symbolism and mysticism of his Elizabethan ancestor. But it was in his veins. And he was going home, back, back to the house with the flying fish on the roof. He felt an immense doom over everything, still the same next morning, when, an hour after dawn, the little train ran out from the doomed little town, on to the plateau, where the cactus thrust up its fluted tubes, and where the mountains stood back, blue, cornflower-blue, so dark and pure in form, in the land of the Greater Day, the day of demons. The little train, with two coaches, one full of natives, the other with four or five 'white' Mexicans, ran fussily on, in the little day of toys and men's machines. On the roof sat tiny, earthy-looking soldiers, faces burnt black, with cartridge-belts and rifles. They clung on tight, not to be shaken off. And away went this weird toy, this crazy little caravan, over the great lost land of cacti and mountains standing back, on to the shut-in defile where the long descent began.

At half-past ten, at a station some distance down the

## THE FLYING FISH

*barranca*, a station connected with old silver mines, the train stood, and all descended to eat: the eternal turkey with black sauce, potatoes, salad, and apple pie – the American apple pie, which is a sandwich of cooked apple between two layers of pie-crust. And also beer, from Puebla. Two Chinamen administered the dinner, in all the decency, cleanness and well-cookedness of the little day of the white men, which they reproduce so well. There it was, the little day of our civilization. Outside, the little train waited. The little black-faced soldiers sharpened their knives. The vast, varying declivity of the *barranca* stood in sun and shadow as on the day of doom, untouched.

On again, winding, descending the huge and savage gully or crack in the plateau-edge, where no men lived. Bushes trailed with elegant pink creeper, such as is seen in hothouses, enormous blue convolvuluses opened out, and in the unseemly tangle of growth, bulbous orchids jutted out from trees, and let hang a trail of white or yellow flower. The strange, entangled squalor of the jungle.

Gethin Day looked down the ravine, where water was running. He saw four small deer lifting their heads from drinking, to look at the train. '*Los venados! los venados!*' he heard the soldiers softly calling. As if knowing they were safe, the deer stood and wondered, away there in the Greater Day, in the manless space, while the train curled round a sharp jutting rock.

They came at last to the bottom, where it was very hot, and a few wild men hung round with the sword-like knives of the sugar-cane. The train seemed to tremble with fear all the time, as if its thread might be cut. So frail, so thin the thread of the lesser day, threading with its business the great reckless heat of the savage land. So frail a thread, so easily snapped!

But the train crept on, northwards, upwards. And as the



stupor of heat began to pass, in the later afternoon, the sick man saw among mango trees, beyond the bright green stretches of sugar-cane, white clusters of a village, with the coloured dome of a church all yellow and blue with shiny majolica tiles. Spain putting the bubbles of her little day among the blackish trees of the unconquerable.

He came at nightfall to a small square town, more in touch with civilization, where the train ended its frightened run. He slept there. And next day he took another scrap of a train across to the edge of the main plateau. The country was wild, but more populous. An occasional big *hacienda* with sugar-mills stood back among the hills. But it was silent. Spain had spent the energy of her little day here, now the silence, the terror of the Greater Day, mysterious with death, was filling in again.

On the train a native, a big, handsome man, wandered back and forth among the uneasy Mexican travellers with a tray of glasses of ice-cream. He was no doubt of the Tlascala tribe. Gethin Day looked at him and met his glistening dark eyes. '*Quiere belados, Señor?*' said the Indian, reaching a glass with his dark, subtle-skinned, workless hand. And in the soft, secret tones of his voice, Gethin Day heard the sound of the Greater Day. '*Gracias!*'

'*Padrón! Padrón!*' moaned a woman at the station. '*Por amor de Dios, Padrón!*' and she held out her hand for a few centavos. And in the moaning croon of her Indian voice the Englishman heard again the fathomless crooning appeal of the Indian women, moaning stranger, more terrible than the ring-dove, with a sadness that had no horizon, and a rocking, moaning appeal that drew out the very marrow of the soul of a man. Over the door of her womb was written not only: '*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate,*' but: '*Perdite ogni pianto, voi ch'uscite.*' For the men who had known these women were beyond weeping and beyond

## THE FLYING FISH

even despair, mute in the timeless compulsion of the Greater Day. Big, proud men could sell glasses of ice-cream at twenty-five centavos, and not really know they were doing it. They were elsewhere, beyond despair. Only sometimes the last passion of the death-lust would sweep them, shut up as they were in the white man's lesser day, belonging as they did to the greater day.

The little train ran on to the main plateau, and to the junction with the main-line railway called the Queen's Own, a railway that still belongs to the English, and that joins Mexico City with the Gulf of Mexico. Here, in the big but forlorn railway restaurant the Englishman ordered the regular meal, that came with American mechanical take-it-or-leave-it flatness. He ate what he could, and went out again. There the vast plains were level and bare, under the blue winter sky, so pure, and not too hot, and in the distance the white cone of the volcano of Orizaba stood perfect in the middle air.

'There is no help. O man. Fear gives thee wings like a bird, death comes after thee open-mouthed, and thou soarest on the wind like a fly. But thy flight is not far, and thy flying is not long. Thou art a fish of the timeless Ocean, and must needs fall back. Take heed lest thou break thyself in the fall! For death is not in dying, but in the fear. Cease then the struggle of thy flight, and fall back into the deep element where death is and is not, and life is not a fleeing away. It is a beauteous thing to live and to be alive. Live then in the Greater Day, and let the waters carry thee, and the flood bear thee along, and live, only live, no more of this hurrying away.'

'No more of this hurrying away.' Even the Elizabethans had known it, the restlessness, the 'hurrying away'. Gethin Day knew he had been hurrying away. He had hurried perhaps a little too far, just over the edge. Now,

try as he might, he was aware of a gap in his time-space *continuum*; he was, in the words of his ancestor, aware of the Greater Day showing through the cracks in the ordinary day. And it was useless trying to fill up the cracks. The little day was destined to crumble away, as far as he was concerned, and he would *have* to inhabit the greater day. The very sight of the volcano cone in mid-air made him know it. His little self was used up, worn out. He felt sick and frail, facing this change of life.

‘Be still, then, be still! Wrap thyself in patience, shroud thyself in peace, as the tall volcano clothes himself in snow. Yet he looks down in him, and sees wet sun in him molten and of great force, stirring with the scald sperm of life. Be still, above the sperm of life, which spills alone in its hour. Be still, as an apple on its core, as a nightingale in winter, as a long-waiting mountain upon its fire. Be still, upon thine own sun.

‘For thou hast a sun in thee. Thou hast a sun in thee, and it is not timed. Therefore wait. Wait, and be at peace with thine own sun, which is thy sperm of life. Be at peace with thy sun in thee, as the volcano is, and the dark holly-bush before berry-time, and the long hours of night. Abide by thy sun in thee, even the onion doth so, though you see it not. Yet peel her, and her sun in thine eyes maketh tears. Each thing hath its little sun, even in the wicked house-fly something twinkleth.’

Standing there on the platform of the station open to the great plains of the plateau, Gethin Day said to himself: My old ancestor is more real to me than the restaurant, and the dinner I have eaten, after all. The train still did not come. He turned to another page of cornflower-blue writing, hoping to find something amusing.

‘When earth inert lieth too heavy, then Vesuvius spitteth out fire. And if a nightingale would not sing, his song un-

## THE FLYING FISH

sung in him would slay him. For to the nightingale his song is Nemesis, and unsung songs are the Erinyes, the impure Furies of vengeance. And thy sun in thee is thy all in all, so be patient, and take no care. Take no care, for what thou knowest is ever less than what thou art. The full fire even of thine own sun in thine own body, thou canst never know. So how shouldst thou load care upon thy sun? Take heed, take thought, take pleasure, take pain, take all things as thy sun stirs. Only fasten not thyself in care about anything, for care is impiety, it spits upon the sun.'

It was the white and still volcano, visionary across the swept plain, that looked back at him as he glanced up from his *Book of Days*. But there the train came, thundering, with all the mock majesty of great equipage, and the Englishman entered the Pullman car, and sat with his book in his pocket.

The train, almost with the splendour of the Greater Day, yet rickety and foolish at last, raced on the level, entered the defile, and crept, cautiously twining round and round, down the cliff-face of the plateau, with the low lands lying thousands of feet below, specked with a village or two like fine specks. Yet the low lands drew up, and the pine trees were gone far above, and at last the thick trees crowded the line, and dark-faced natives ran beside the train selling gardenias, gardenia perfume heavy in all the air. But the train nearly empty.

Veracruz at night-fall was a modern stone port, but disheartened and tropical, mostly shut up, abandoned, as if life had quietly left it. Great customs buildings, unworking, acres of pianofortes in packing-cases, all the endless jetsam of the little day of commerce flung up here and waiting, acres of goods unattended to, waiting till the labour of Veracruz should cease to be on strike. A town, a port struck numb, the inner sun striking vengefully at the little

life of commerce. The day's sun set, there was a heavy orange light over the waters, something sinister, a gloom, a deep resentment in nature, even in the washing of the warm sea. In these salt waters natives were still baptized to Christianity, and the socialists, in mockery perhaps, baptized themselves into the mystery of frustration and revenge. The port was in the hands of strikers and wild out-of-workers, and was blank. Officials had almost disappeared. Even here, a woman, a 'lady' examined the passports.

But the ship rode at the end of the jetty: the one lonely passenger ship. There was one other steamer – from Sweden, a cargo boat. For the rest, the port was deserted. It was a point where the wild primeval day of this continent met the busy white man's day, and the two annulled one another. The result was a port of nullity, nihilism concrete and actual, calling itself the city of the True Cross.

## 2 *The Gulf*

In the morning they sailed off, away from the hot shores, from the high land hanging up inwards. And world gives place to world. In an hour, it was only ship and ocean, the world of land and affairs was gone.

There were few people on board. In the second-class saloon only seventeen souls. Gethin Day was travelling second. It was a German boat, he knew it would be clean and comfortable. The second-class fare was already forty-five pounds. And a man who is not rich, and who would live his life under as little compulsion as possible, must calculate keenly with money and its power. For the lesser day of money and the mealy-mouthed Mammon is always ready for a victim, and a man who has glimpsed the Greater Day, and the inward sun, will not fall into the clutches of

Mammon's mean day, if he can help it. Gethin Day had a moderate income, and he looked on this as his bulwark against Mammon's despicable authority. The thought of earning a living was repulsive and humiliating to him.

In the first-class saloon were only four persons: two Danish merchants, stout and wealthy, who had been part of a bunch of Danish business men invited by the Mexican government to look at the business resources of the land. They had been fêted and feasted, and shown what they were meant to see, so now, fuller of business than ever, they were going back to Copenhagen to hatch the eggs they had conceived. But they had also eaten oysters in Veracruz, and the oysters also were inside them. They fell sick of poison, and lay deathly ill all the voyage, leaving the only other first-class passengers, an English knight and his son, alone in their glory. Gethin Day was sincerely glad he had escaped the first class, for the voyage was twenty days.

The seventeen souls of the second class were four of them English, two Danish, five Spaniards, five Germans, and a Cuban. They all sat at one long table in the dining-saloon, the Cuban at one end of the table, flanked by four English on his left, facing the five Spaniards across the table. Then came the two Danes, facing one another, and being buffer-state between the rest and the five Germans, who occupied the far end of the table. It was a German boat, so the Germans were very noisy, and the stewards served them first. The Spaniards and the Cuban were mum, the English were stiff, the Danes were uneasy, the Germans were boisterous, and so the first luncheon passed. It was the lesser day of the ship, and small enough. The menu being in correct German and doubtful Spanish, the Englishwoman on Gethin Day's right put up a lorgnette and stared at it. She was unable to stare it out of countenance, so she put it down and ate, uninformed as to what she

was eating. The Spaniard opposite Gethin Day had come to table without collar or tie, doing the bluff, go-to-hell colonial touch, almost in his shirt-sleeves. He was a man of about thirty-two. He brayed at the steward in strange, harsh Galician Spanish, the steward grinned somewhat sneeringly and answered in German, having failed to understand, and not prepared to exert himself to try. Down the table a blonde horse of a woman was shouting at the top of her voice, in harsh North-German, to a Herr Doktor with turned-up moustaches who presided at the German head of the table. The Spaniards bent forward in a row to look with a sort of silent horror at the yelling woman, then they looked at one another with a faint grimace of mocking repulsion. The Galician banged the table with the empty wine-decanter: wine was 'included'. The steward, with a sneering little grin at such table-manners, brought a decanter half full. Wine was not *ad lib.*, but *à discrétion*. The Spaniards, having realized this, henceforth snatched it quickly and pretty well emptied the decanter before the English got a shot at it. Which somewhat amused the table-stewards, who wanted to see the two foreign lots fight it out. But Gethin Day solved this problem by holding out his hand to the fat, clean-shaven Basque, as soon as the decanter reached that gentleman, and saying: 'May I serve the lady?' Whereupon the Basque handed over the decanter, and Gethin helped the two ladies and himself, before handing back the decanter to the Spaniards. — Man wants but little here below, but he's damn well got to see he gets it. — All this is part of the little day, which has to be seen to. Whether it is interesting or not depends on one's state of soul.

Bristling with all the bristles of offence and defence which a man has to put up the first days in such a company, Gethin Day would go off down the narrow gangway of the

## THE FLYING FISH

bottom deck, down into the steerage, where the few passengers lay about in shirt and trousers, on to the very front tip of the boat.

She was a long, narrow, old ship, long like a cigar, and not much space in her. Yet she was pleasant, and had a certain grace of her own, was a real ship, not merely a 'liner'. She seemed to travel swift and clean, piercing away into the Gulf.

Gethin Day would sit for hours at the very tip of the ship, on the bowsprit, looking out into the whitish sunshine of the hot Gulf of Mexico. Here he was alone, and the world was all strange white sunshine, candid, and water, warm, bright water, perfectly pure beneath him, of an exquisite frail green. It lifted vivid wings from the running tip of the ship, and threw white pinion-spray from its green edges. And always, always, always it was in the two-winged fountain, as the ship came like life between, and always the spray fell swishing, pattering from the green arch of the water-wings. And below, as yet untouched, a moment ahead, always a moment ahead, and perfectly untouched, was the lovely green depth of the water, depth, deep, shallow-pale emerald above an under sapphire-green, dark and pale, blue and shimmer-green, two waters, many waters, one water, perfect in unison, one moment ahead of the ship's bows, so serene, fathomless and pure and free of time. It was very lovely, and on the softly-lifting bowsprit of the long, swift ship the body was cradled in the sway of timeless life, the soul lay in the jewel-coloured moment, the jewel-pure eternity of this gulf of nowhere.

And always, always, like a dream, the flocks of flying fish swept into the air, from nowhere, and went brilliantly twinkling in their flight of silvery watery wings rapidly fluttering, away, low as swallows over the smooth curved



surface of the sea, then gone again, vanished, without splash or evidence, gone. One alone like a little silver twinkle. Gone! The sea was still and silky-surfaced, blue and softly heaving, empty, purity itself, sea, sea, sea.

Then suddenly the faint whispering crackle, and a cloud of silver on webs of pure, fluttering water was soaring low over the surface of the sea, at an angle from the ship, as if jetted away from the cut-water soaring in a low arc, fluttering with the wild emphasis of grasshoppers or locusts suddenly burst out of the grass, in a wild rush to make away, make away, and making it, away, away, then suddenly gone, like a lot of lights blown out in one breath. And still the ship did not pause, any more than the moon pauses, neither to look nor catch breath. But the soul pauses and holds its breath, for wonder, wonder, which is the very breath of the soul.

All the long morning he would be there curled in the wonder of this gulf of creation, where the flying fishes on translucent wings swept in their ecstatic clouds out of the water, in a terror that was brilliant as joy, in a joy brilliant with terror, with wings made of pure water flapping with great speed, and long-shafted bodies of translucent silver like squirts of living water, there in air, brilliant in air, before suddenly they had disappeared, and the blue sea was trembling with a delicate frail surface of green, the still sea lay one moment ahead, untouched, untouched since time began, in its watery loveliness.

Sometimes a ship's officer would come and peer over the edge, and look at him lying there. But nothing was said. People didn't like looking over the edge. It was too beautiful, too pure and lovely, the Greater Day. They shoved their snouts a moment over the rail, then withdrew, faintly abashed, faintly sneering, faintly humiliated. After all, they showed snouts, nothing but snouts, to the

## THE FLYING FISH

unbegotten morning, so they might well be humiliated.

Sometimes an island, two islands, three, would show up, dismal and small, with the peculiar American gloom. No land! The soul wanted to see the land. Only the uninterrupted water was purely lovely, pristine.

And the third morning there was a school of porpoises leading the ship. They stayed below surface all the time, so there was no hullabaloo of human staring. Only Gethin Day saw them. And what joy! what joy of life! what marvellous pure joy of being a porpoise within the great sea, of being many porpoises heading and mocking in translucent onrush the menacing, yet futile onrush of a vast ship!

It was a spectacle of the purest and most perfected joy in life that Gethin Day ever saw. The porpoises were ten or a dozen, round-bodied torpedo fish, and they stayed there as if they were not moving, always there, with no motion apparent, under the purely pellucid water, yet speeding on at just the speed of the ship, without the faintest show of movement, yet speeding on in the most miraculous precision of speed. It seemed as if the tail-flukes of the last fish exactly touched the ship's bows, under-water, with the frailest, yet precise and permanent touch. It seemed as if nothing moved, yet fish and ship swept on through the tropical ocean. And the fish moved, they changed places all the time. They moved in a little cloud, and with the most wonderful sport they were above, they were below, they were to the fore, yet all the time the same one speed, the same one speed, and the last fish just touching with his tail-flukes the iron cut-water of the ship. Some would be down in the blue, shadowy, but horizontally motionless in the same speed. Then with a strange revolution, these would be up in pale green water, and others would be down. Even the toucher, who touched the ship, would in a twinkling be changed. And ever, ever the same pure

horizontal speed, sometimes a dark back skimming the water's surface light, from beneath, but never the surface broken. And ever the last fish touching the ship, and ever the others speeding in motionless, effortless speed, and intertwining with strange silkiness as they sped, intertwining among one another, fading down to the dark blue shadow, and strangely emerging again among the silent, swift others, in pale green water. All the time, so swift, they seemed to be laughing.

Gethin Day watched spell-bound, minute after minute, an hour, two hours, and still it was the same, the ship speeding, cutting the water, and the strong-bodied fish heading in perfect balance of speed underneath, mingling among themselves in some strange single laughter of multiple consciousness, giving off the joy of life, sheer joy of life, togetherness in pure complete motion, many lusty-bodied fish enjoying one laugh of life, sheer togetherness, perfect as passion. They gave off into the water their marvellous joy of life, such as the man had never met before. And it left him wonderstruck.

'But they know joy, they know pure joy!' he said to himself in amazement. 'This is the most laughing joy I have ever seen, pure and unmixed. I always thought flowers had brought themselves to the most beautiful perfection in nature. But these fish, these fleshy, warm-bodied fish achieve more than flowers, heading along. This is the purest achievement of joy I have seen in all life: these strong, careless fish. Men have not got in them that secret to be alive together and make one like a single laugh, yet each fish going his own gait. This is sheer joy – and men have lost it, or never accomplished it. The cleverest sportsmen in the world are owls beside these fish. And the togetherness of love is nothing to the spinning unison of dolphins playing under-sea. It would be wonderful to

### THE FLYING FISH

know joy as these fish know it. The life of the deep waters is ahead of us, it contains sheer togetherness and sheer joy. We have never got there.'

There as he leaned over the bowsprit he was mesmerized by one thing only, by joy, by joy of life, fish speeding in water with playful joy. No wonder Ocean was still mysterious, when such red hearts beat in it! No wonder man, with his tragedy, was a pale and sickly thing in comparison! What civilization will bring us to such a pitch of swift laughing togetherness, as these fish have reached?

### 3 *The Atlantic*

The ship came in the night to Cuba, to Havana. When she became still, Gethin Day looked out of his port-hole and saw little lights on upreared darkness. Havana!

They went on shore next morning, through the narrow dock-streets near the wharf, to the great boulevard. It was a lovely warm morning, already early December, and the town was in the streets, going to mass, or coming out of the big, unpleasant old churches. The Englishman wandered with the two Danes for an hour or so, in the not very exciting city. Many Americans were wandering around, and nearly all wore badges of some sort. The city seemed, on the surface at least, very American. And underneath, it did not seem to have any very deep character of its own left.

The three men hired a car to drive out and about. The elder of the Danes, a man of about forty-five, spoke fluent colloquial Spanish, learned on the oil-fields of Tampico. 'Tell me,' he said to the chauffeur, 'why do all these *americanos*, these Yankees, wear badges on themselves?'

He spoke, as foreigners nearly always do speak of the Yankees, in a tone of half-spiteful jeering.

'Ah, Señor,' said the driver, with a Cuban grin. 'You know they all come here to drink. They drink so much that they all get lost at night, so they all wear a badge: name, name of hotel, place where it is. Then our policemen find them in the night, turn them over as they lie on the pavement, read name, name of hotel, and place, and so they are put on a cart and carted to home. Ah, the season is only just beginning. Wait a week or two, and they will lie in the streets at night like a battle, and the police doing Red Cross work, carting them to their hotels. Ah, *los americanos!* They are so good. You know they own us now. Yes, they own us. They own Havana. We are a Republic owned by the Americans. *Muy bien*, we give them drink, they give us money. Bah!'

And he grinned with a kind of acrid indifference. He sneered at the whole show, but he wasn't going to do anything about it.

The car drove out to the famous beer-gardens, where all drank beer – then to the inevitable cemetery, which almost rivalled that of New Orleans. 'Every person buried in this cemetery guarantees to put up a tomb-monument costing not less than fifty-thousand dollars.' Then they drove past the new suburb of villas, springing up neat and tidy, spick-and-span, same all the world over. Then they drove out into the country, past the old sugar *haciendas* and to the hills.

And to Gethin Day it was all merely depressing and void of real interest. The Yankees owned it all. It had not much character of its own. And what character it had was the peculiar, dreary character of all America wherever it is a little abandoned. The peculiar gloom of Connecticut or New Jersey, Louisiana or Georgia, a sort of dreariness in the very bones of the land, that shows through immediately the human effort sinks. How quickly the gloom

## THE FLYING FISH

and the inner dreariness of Cuba must have affected the spirit of the Conquistadores, even Columbus!

They drove back to town and ate a really good meal, and watched a stout American couple, apparently man and wife, lunching with a bottle of champagne, a bottle of hock, and a bottle of Burgundy for the two of them, and apparently drinking them all at once. It made one's head reel.

The bright, sunny afternoon they spent on the esplanade by the sea. There the great hotels were still shut. But they had, so to speak, half an eye open: a tea-room going, for example.

And Day thought again, how tedious the little day can be! How difficult to spend even one Sunday looking at a city like Havana, even if one has spent the morning driving into the country. The infinite tedium of looking at things! the infinite boredom of things anyhow. Only the rippling, bright, pale-blue sea, and the old fort, gave one the feeling of life. The rest, the great esplanade, the great boulevard, the great hotels, all seemed what they were, dead, dried concrete, concrete, dried deadness.

Everybody was thankful to be back on the ship for dinner, in the dark loneliness of the wharves. See Naples and die. Go seeing any place, and you'll be half dead of exhaustion and tedium by dinner time.

So! good-bye, Havana! The engines were going before breakfast time. It was a bright blue morning. Wharves and harbour slid past, the high bows moved backwards. Then the ship deliberately turned her back on Cuba and the sombre shore, and began to move north, through the blue day, which passed like a sleep. They were moving now into wide space.

The next morning they woke to greyness, grey low sky, and

hideous low grey water, and a still air. Sandwiched between two greynesses, the long, wicked old ship sped on, as unto death.

‘What has happened?’ Day asked of one of the officers.

‘We have come north, to get into the current running east. We come north about the latitude of New York, then we run due east with the stream.’

‘What a wicked shame!’

And indeed it was. The sun was gone, the blueness was gone, life was gone. The Atlantic was like a cemetery, an endless, infinite cemetery of greyness, where the bright, lost world of Atlantis is buried. It was December, grey, dark December on a waste of ugly, dead-grey water, under a dead-grey sky.

And so they ran into a swell, a long swell whose oily, sickly waves seemed hundreds of miles long, and travelling in the same direction as the ship’s course. The narrow cigar of a ship heaved up the upslope with a nauseating heave, up, up, up, till she righted for a second sickeningly on the top, then tilted, and her screw raced like a dentist’s burr in a hollow tooth. Then down she slid, down the long, shivering downslope, leaving all her guts behind her, and the guts of all the passengers too. In an hour, everybody was deathly white, and sicklily grinning, thinking it a sort of joke that would soon be over. Then everybody disappeared, and the game went on: up, up, up, heavingly up, till a pause, ah! – then burr-rr-rr! as the screw came out of water and shattered every nerve. Then whooooosh! the long and awful downrush, leaving the entrails behind.

She was like a plague-ship, everybody disappeared, stewards and everybody. Gethin Day felt as if he had taken poison: and he slept – slept, slept, slept, and yet was all the time aware of the ghastly motion – up, up, up, heavingly up, then ah! one moment, followed by the shattering

## THE FLYING FISH

burr-rr-rr! and the unspeakable ghastliness of the downhill slither, where death seemed inside the entrails, and water chattered like the after-death. He was aware of the hour-long moaning, moaning of the Spanish doctor's fat, pale Mexican wife, two cabins away. It went on for ever. Everything went on for ever. Everything was like this for ever, for ever. And he slept, slept, slept, for thirty hours, yet knowing it all, registering just the endless repetition of the motion, the ship's loud squeaking and chirruping, and the ceaseless moaning of the woman.

Suddenly at tea-time the second day he felt better. He got up. The ship was empty. A ghastly steward gave him a ghastly cup of tea, then disappeared. He dozed again, but came to dinner.

They were three people at the long table, in the horribly travelling grey silence: himself, a young Dane, and the elderly, dried Englishwoman. She talked, talked. The three looked in terror at *Sauerkraut* and smoked loin of pork. But they ate a little. Then they looked out on the utterly repulsive, grey, oily, windless night. Then they went to bed again.

The third evening it began to rain, and the motion was subsiding. They were running out of the swell. But it was an experience to remember.

(Unfinished)



## *Delilah and Mr Bircumshaw*

'HE looked,' said Mrs Bircumshaw to Mrs Gillatt, 'he looked like a positive saint: one of the noble sort, you know, that will suffer with head up and with dreamy eyes. I nearly died of laughing.'

She spoke of Mr Bircumshaw, who darted a look at his wife's friend. Mrs Gillatt broke into an almost derisive laugh. Bircumshaw shut tight his mouth, and set his large, square jaw. Frowning, he lowered his face out of sight.

Mrs Bircumshaw seemed to glitter in the twilight. She was like a little, uncanny machine, working unheard and unknown, but occasionally snapping a spark. A small woman, very quiet in her manner, it was surprising that people should so often say of her, 'She's *very* vivacious.' It was her eyes: they were brown, very wide-open, very swift and ironic. As a rule she said little. This evening, her words and her looks were quick and brilliant. She had been married four years.

'I was thankful, I can tell you, that you didn't go,' she continued to Mrs Gillatt. 'For a church pageant, it was the most astonishing show. People blossomed out so differently. I never knew what a fine apostle was lost in Harry. When I saw him, I thought I should scream.'

'You looked sober enough every time I noticed you,' blurted Harry, in deep bass.

'You were much too rapt to notice *me*,' his wife laughed gaily. Nevertheless, her small head was lifted and alert, like a fighting bird's. Mrs Gillatt fell instinctively into rank with her, unconscious of the thrill of battle that moved her.

Mr Bircumshaw, bowing forward, rested his arms on his knees, and whistled silently as he contemplated his

'And usually, you know,' the wife broke off, 'there's a good deal of the whipped schoolboy about his walk.'

'There is, Harry,' laughed Mrs Gillatt, shaking her white and jewelled hand at him. 'You just remember that for the next time, my lad.' She was his senior by some eight years. He grinned sickly.

'But now,' Mrs Bircumshaw continued, 'he marched like a young Magi. You could see a look of the Star in his eyes.'

'Oh,' cried Mrs Gillatt. 'Oh! the look of the Star -!'

'Often the look of the Great Bear, isn't it?' queried Mrs Bircumshaw.

'That is quite true, Harry,' said the elder woman, laughing.

Bircumshaw cracked his strong fingers, brutally.

'Well, he came on,' continued the wife, 'with the light of the Star in his eyes, his mouth fairly sweet with Christian resignation -'

'Oh!' cried Mrs Gillatt, 'oh - and he beats the baby. Christian resignation!' She laughed aloud. 'Let me hear of you beating that child again, Harry Bircumshaw, and I'll Christian-resignation you -'

Suddenly she remembered that this might implicate her friend. 'I came in yesterday,' she explained, 'at dinner. "What's the matter, baby?" I said, "what are you crying for?" "Dadda beat baby - naughty baby." It was a good thing you had gone back to business, my lad, I can tell you. . . .'

Mrs Bircumshaw glanced swiftly at her husband. He had ducked his head and was breaking his knuckles tensely. She turned her head with a quick, thrilled movement, more than ever like a fighting bird.

'And you know his nose,' she said, blithely resuming her narrative, as if it were some bit of gossip. 'You know

it usually looks a sort of "Mind your own business or you'll get a hit in the jaw" nose?"

'Yes,' cried Mrs Gillatt, 'it does -' and she seemed unable to contain her laughter. Then she dropped her fine head, pretending to be an angry buffalo glaring under bent brows, seeking whom he shall devour, in imitation of Harry's nose.

Mrs Bircumshaw bubbled with laughter.

'Ah!' said Mrs Gillatt, and she winked at her friend as she sweetened Harry's pill, 'I know him - I know him.' Then: 'And what *did* his nose look like?' she asked of the wife.

'Like Sir Galahad on horseback,' said Ethel Bircumshaw, spending her last shot.

Mrs Gillatt drew her hand down her own nose, which was straight, with thin, flexible nostrils.

'How does it feel, Harry,' she asked, 'to stroke Galahad on horseback?'

'I don't know, I'm sure,' he said icily.

'Then stroke it, man, and tell me,' cried the elder woman: with which *her* last shot was sped. There was a moment of painful silence.

'And the way the others acted - it was screamingly funny,' the wife started. Then the two women, with one accord, began to make mock of the other actors in the pageant, people they knew, ridiculing them, however, only for blemishes that Harry had not, pulling the others to pieces in places where Harry was solid, thus leaving their man erect like a hero among the litter of his acquaintances.

This did not mollify him: it only persuaded him he was a fine figure, not to be carped at.

Suddenly, before the women had gone far, Bircumshaw jumped up. Mrs Gillatt started. She got a glimpse of his strict form, in its blue serge, passing before her, then the door banged behind him.

Mrs Gillatt was really astonished. She had helped in clipping this ignoble Samson, all unawares, from instinct. She had no idea of what she had been doing. She sat erect and superb, the picture of astonishment that is merging towards contempt.

'Is it someone at the door?' she asked, listening.

Mrs Bircumshaw, with alert, listening eyes, shook her head quickly, with a meaning look of contempt.

'Is he mad?' whispered the elder woman. Her friend nodded. Then Mrs Gillatt's eyes dilated, and her face hardened with scorn. Mrs Bircumshaw had not ceased to listen. She bent forward.

'Praise him,' she whispered, making a quick gesture that they should play a bit of fiction. They rose with zest to the game. 'Praise him,' whispered the wife. Then she herself began. Every woman is a first-rate actress in private. She leaned forward, and in a slightly lowered yet very distinct voice, screened as if for privacy, yet penetrating clearly to the ears of her husband – he had lingered in the hall, she could hear – she said:

'You know Harry really acted splendidly.'

'I know,' said Mrs Gillatt eagerly. 'I know. I know he's a really good actor.'

'He is. The others did look paltry beside him, I have to confess.'

Harry's pride was soothed, but his wrath was not appeased.

'Yes,' he heard the screened voice of his wife say. 'But for all that, I don't care to see him on the stage. It's not manly, somehow. It seems unworthy of a man with any character, somehow. Of course it's all right for strangers – but for anyone you care for – anyone *very* near to you –'

Mrs Gillatt chuckled to herself: this was a thing well done. The two women, however, had not praised very long – and the wife's praise was sincere by the time she

had finished her first sentence – before they were startled by a loud ‘Thud!’ on the floor above their heads. Both started. It was dark, nearly nine o’clock. They listened in silence. Then came another ‘Thud!’

Mrs Bircumshaw gave a little spurt of bitter-temptuous laughter.

‘He’s not –?’ began Mrs Gillatt.

‘He’s gone to bed, and announces the fact by dropping his boots as he takes them off,’ said the young wife bitterly.

Mrs Gillatt was wide-eyed with amazement. ‘You don’t mean it!’ she exclaimed.

Childless, married to an uxorious man whom she loved, this state of affairs was monstrous to her. Neither of the women spoke for a while. It was dark in the room. Then Mrs Gillatt began, sotto voce:

‘Well, I could never have believed it, no, not if you’d told me for ever. He’s always so fussy –’

So she went on. Mrs Bircumshaw let her continue. A restrained woman herself, the other’s outburst relieved her own tension. When she had sufficiently overcome her own emotion, and when she knew her husband to be in bed, she rose.

‘Come into the kitchen, we can talk there,’ she said. There was a new hardness in her voice. She had not ‘talked’ before to anyone, had never mentioned her husband in blame.

The kitchen was bare, with drab walls glistening to the naked gas-jet. The tiled floor was uncovered, cold and damp. Everything was clean, stark and cheerless. The large stove, littered with old paper, was black, black-cold. There was a baby’s high chair in one corner, and a teddy-bear, and a tin pigeon. Mrs Bircumshaw threw a cloth on the table that was pushed up under the drab-blinded window, against the great, black stove, which radiated coldness since it could not radiate warmth.

'Will you stay to supper?' asked Mrs Bircumshaw.

'What have you got?' was the frank reply.

'I'm afraid there's only bread and cheese.'

'No thanks then. I don't eat bread and cheese for supper, Ethel, and you ought not.'

They talked – or rather Mrs Gillatt held forth for a few minutes, on suppers. Then there was a silence.

'I never knew such a thing in my life,' began Mrs Gillatt, rather awkwardly, as a tentative: she wanted her friend to unbosom. 'Is he often like it?' she persisted.

'Oh yes.'

'Well, I can see now,' Mrs Gillatt declared, 'I can understand now. Often have I come in and seen you with your eyes all red: but you've not said anything, so I haven't liked to. But I know now. Just fancy – the brute! – and will he be all right when you go to bed?'

'Oh no.'

'Will he keep it up tomorrow?' Mrs Gillatt's tone expressed nothing short of amazed horror.

'Oh yes, and very likely for two or three days.'

'Oh the brute! the brute!! Well, this *has* opened my eyes. I've been watching a few of these men lately, and I tell you –. You'll not sleep with him tonight, shall you?'

'It would only make it worse.'

'Worse or not worse, I wouldn't. You've got another bed aired – you had visitors till yesterday – there's the bed – take baby and sleep there.'

'It would only make it worse,' said Mrs Bircumshaw, wearily. Mrs Gillatt was silent a moment.

'Well – you're better to him than I should be, I can tell you,' she said. 'Ah, the brute, to think he should always be so fair and fussy to my face, and I think him so nice. But let him touch that child again –! Haven't I seen her with her little arms red? "Gentlemanly" – so fond of quoting his "gentlemanly"! Eh, but this has opened my eyes,

Ethel. Only let him touch that child again, to my knowledge. I only wish he would.'

Mrs Bircumshaw listened to this threat in silence. Yet she did wish she could see the mean bully in her husband matched by this spoiled, arrogant, generous woman.

'But tell him, Ethel,' said Mrs Gillatt, bending from her handsome height, and speaking in considerate tones, 'tell him that I saw nothing – nothing. Tell him I thought he had suddenly been called to the door: tell him that – and that I thought he'd gone down the "Drive" with a caller – say that – you can do it, it's perfectly true – I did think so. So tell him – the brute!'

Mrs Bircumshaw listened patiently, occasionally smiling to herself. She would tell her husband nothing, would never mention the affair to him. Moreover, she intended her husband to think he had made a fool of himself before this handsome woman whom he admired so much.

Bircumshaw heard his wife's friend take her leave. He had been in torment while the two women were together in the far-off kitchen. Now the brute in him felt more sure, more triumphant. He was afraid of *two* women: he could cow one. He felt he had something to punish: that he had his own dignity and authority to assert: and he was going to punish, was going to assert.

'I should think,' said Mrs Gillatt in departing, 'that you won't take him any supper.'

Mrs Bircumshaw felt a sudden blaze of anger against him. But she laughed deprecatingly.

'You *are* a silly thing if you do,' cried the other. 'My word, I'd starve him if I had him.'

'But you see you haven't got him,' said the wife quietly.

'No, I'm thankful to say. But if I had – the brute!'

He heard her go, and was relieved. Now he could lie in bed and sulk to his heart's content, and inflict the penalties of ill-humour on his insolent wife. He was such a lusty,

emotional man – and he had nothing to do. What was his work to him? Scarcely more than nothing. And what was to fill the rest of his life – nothing. He wanted something to do, and he thought he wanted more done for him. So he got into this irritable, sore state of moral debility. A man cannot respect himself unless he does something. But he can do without his own positive self-respect, so long as his wife respects him. But when the man who has no foothold for self-esteem sees his wife and his wife's friend despise him, it is hell: he fights for very life. So Bir-cumshaw lay in bed in this state of ignoble misery. His wife had striven for a long time to pretend he was still her hero: but he had tried her patience too far. Now he was confounding heroism, mastery, with brute tyranny. He would be a tyrant, if not a hero.

She, downstairs, occasionally smiled to herself. This time she had given him his dues. Though her heart was pained and anxious, still she smiled: she had clipped a large lock from her Samson. Her smile rose from the deep of her woman's nature.

After having eaten a very little supper, she worked about the house till ten o'clock. Her face had regained that close impassivity which many women wear when alone. Still impassive, at the end of her little tasks she fetched the dinner joint and made him four sandwiches, carefully seasoned and trimmed. Pouring him a glass of milk, she went upstairs with the tray, which looked fresh and tempting.

He had been listening acutely to her last movements. As she entered, however, he lay well under the bedclothes, breathing steadily, pretending to sleep. She came in quite calmly.

'Here is your supper,' she said, in a quiet, indifferent tone, ignoring the fact that he was supposed to be asleep. Another lock fell from his strength. He felt virtue depart



from him, felt weak and watery in spirit, and he hated her. He made no reply, but kept up his pretence of sleep.

She bent over the cot of the sleeping baby, a bonny child of three. The little one was flushed in her sleep. Her fist was clenched in a tangle of hair over her small round ear, whilst even in sleep she pouted in her wilful, imperious way. With very gentle fingers the mother loosened the bright hair and put it back from the full, small brow, that reminded one of the brow of a little Virgin by Memling. The father felt that he was left out, ignored. He would have wished to whisper a word to his wife, and so bring himself into the trinity, had he not been so wroth. He retired further into his manly bulk, felt weaker and more miserably insignificant, at the same time more enraged.

Mrs Bircumshaw slipped into bed quietly, settling to rest at once, as far as possible from the broad form of her husband. Both lay quite still, although, as each knew, neither slept. The man felt he wanted to move, but his will was so weak and shrinking, he could not rouse his muscles. He lay tense, paralyzed with self-conscious shrinking, yet bursting to move. She nestled herself down quite at ease. She did not care, this evening, how he felt or thought: for once she let herself rest in indifference.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, just as she was drifting into sleep, her eyes flew open. She did not start or stir; she was merely wide awake. A match had been struck.

Her husband was sitting up in bed, leaning forward to the plate on the chair. Very carefully, she turned her head just enough to see him. His big back bulked above her. He was leaning forward to the chair. The candle, which he had set on the floor, so that its light should not penetrate the sleep of his wife, threw strange shadows on the ceiling, and lighted his throat and underneath his strong

chin. Through the arch of his arm, she could see his jaw and his throat working. For some strange reason, he felt that he could not eat in the dark. Occasionally she could see his cheek bulged with food. He ate rapidly, almost voraciously, leaning over the edge of the bed and taking care of the crumbs. She noticed the weight of his shoulder muscles at rest upon the arm on which he leaned.

'The strange animal!' she said to herself, and she laughed, laughed heartily within herself.

'Are they nice?' she longed to say, slyly.

'Are they nice?' – she must say it – 'are they nice?' The temptation was almost too great. But she was afraid of this lusty animal startled at his feeding. She dared not twit him.

He took the milk, leaned back, almost arching backwards over her as he drank. She shrank with a little fear, a little repulsion, which was nevertheless half pleasurable. Cowering under his shadow, she shrugged with contempt, yet her eyes widened with a small, excited smile. This vanished, and a real scorn hardened her lips: when he was sulky his blood was cold as water, nothing could rouse it to passion; he resisted caresses as if he had thin acid in his veins. 'Mean in the blood,' she said to herself.

He finished the food and milk, licked his lips, nipped out the candle, then stealthily lay down. He seemed to sink right into a grateful sleep.

'Nothing on earth is so vital to him as a meal,' she thought.

She lay a long time thinking, before she fell asleep.

## *A Dream of Life*

NOTHING depresses me more than to come home to the place where I was born, and where I lived my first twenty years, here, at Newthorpe, this coal-mining village on the Nottingham-Derby border. The place has grown, but not very much, the pits are poor. Only it has changed. There is a tram-line from Nottingham through the one street, and buses to Nottingham and Derby. The shops are bigger, more plate-glassy: there are two picture-palaces, and one Palais de Danse.

But nothing can save the place from the poor, grimy, mean effect of the Midlands, the little grimy brick houses with slate roofs, the general effect of paltriness, smallness, meanness, fathomless ugliness, combined with a sort of chapel-going respectability. It is the same as when I was a boy, only more so.

Now, it is all tame. It was bad enough, thirty years ago, when it was still on the upward grade, economically. But then the old race of miners were not immensely respectable. They filled the pubs with smoke and bad language, and they went with dogs at their heels. There was a sense of latent wildness and unbrokenness, a weird sense of thrill and adventure in the pitch-dark Midland nights, and roaring footballing Saturday afternoons. The country in between the colliery regions had a lonely sort of fierceness and beauty, half-abandoned, and threaded with poaching colliers and whippet dogs. Only thirty years ago!

Now it seems so different. The colliers of today are the men of my generation, lads I went to school with. I find it hard to believe. They were rough, wild lads. They are not rough, wild men. The board-school, the Sunday-school,

the Band of Hope, and, above all, their mothers got them under. Got them under, made them tame. Made them sober, conscientious, and decent. Made them good husbands. When I was a boy, a collier who was a good husband was an exception to the rule, and while the women with bad husbands pointed him out as a shining example, they also despised him a little, as a petticoat man.

But nearly all the men of my generation are good husbands. There they stand, at the street corners, pale, shrunken, well-dressed, decent, and *under*. The drunken colliers of my father's generation were not got under. The decent colliers of my generation are got under entirely. They are so patient, so forbearing, so willing to listen to reason, so ready to put themselves aside. And there they stand, at the street corners and the entry-ends, the rough lads I went to school with, men now, with smart daughters and bossy wives and cigarette-smoking lads of their own. There they stand, then, and white as cheap wax candles, spectral, as if they had no selves any more: decent, patient, self-effacing sort of men, who have seen the war and the high-watermark wages, and now are down again, under, completely under, with not a tuppence to rattle in their pockets. There they are, poor as their fathers before them, but poor with a hopeless outlook and a new and expensive world around them.

When I was a boy, the men still used to sing: 'There's a good time coming, boys, there's a good time coming!' Well, it has come and gone. If anybody sang now, they'd sing: 'It's a bad time now, and a worse time coming.' But the men of my generation are dumb: they have been got under and made good.

As for the next generation, that is something different. As soon as mothers become self-conscious, sons become what their mothers make them. My mother's generation

was the first generation of working-class mothers to become really self-conscious. Our grandmothers were still too much under our grandfathers' thumb, and there was still too much masculine kick against petticoat rule. But with the next generation, the woman freed herself at least mentally and spiritually from the husband's domination, and then she became that great institution, that character-forming power, the mother of my generation. I am sure the character of nine-tenths of the men of my generation was formed by the mother: the character of the daughters too.

And what sort of characters? Well, the woman of my mother's generation was in reaction against the ordinary high-handed, obstinate husband who went off to the pub to enjoy himself and to waste the bit of money that was so precious to the family. The woman felt herself the higher moral being: and justly, as far as economic morality goes. She therefore assumed the major responsibility for the family, and the husband let her. So she proceeded to mould a generation.

Mould it to the shape of her own unfulfilled desire, of course. What had she wanted, all her life? – a 'good' husband, gentle and understanding and moral, one who did not go to pubs and drink and waste the bit of wages, but who lived for his wife and his children.

Millions of mothers in Great Britain, in the latter half of Victoria's reign, unconsciously proceeded to produce sons to pattern. And they produced them, by the million: good sons, who would make good, steady husbands who would live for their wives and families. And there they are! we've got 'em now! the men of my generation, men between forty and fifty, men who almost all had Mothers with a big *m*.

And then the daughters! Because the mothers who produced so many 'good sons' and future 'good husbands'

were at the same time producing daughters, perhaps without taking so much thought or exercising so much will-power over it, but producing them just as inevitably.

What sort of daughters came from these morally responsible mothers? As we should expect, daughters morally confident. The mothers had known some little hesitancy in their moral supremacy. But the daughters were quite assured. The daughters were always right. They were born with a sense of self-rightness that sometimes was hoity-toity, and sometimes was seemingly wistful: but there it was, the inevitable sense that I-am-right. This the women of my generation drew in with their mothers' milk, this feeling that they were 'right' and must be 'right' and nobody must gainsay them. It is like being born with one eye: you can't help it.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. This terrible truth should never be forgotten. Our grandmothers dreamed of wonderful 'free' womanhood in a 'pure' world, surrounded by 'adoring, humble, high-minded' men. Our mothers started to put the dream into practice. And we are the fulfilment. We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams were made on.

For I think it cannot be denied that ours is the generation of 'free' womanhood, and a helplessly 'pure' world, and of pathetic 'adoring, humble, high-minded' men.

We are, more or less, such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. But the dream changes with every new generation of grandmothers. Already my mother, while having a definite ideal for her sons, of 'humble, adoring, high-minded' men, began to have secret dreams of her own: dreams of some Don Juan sort of person whose influence would make the vine of Dionysus grow and coil over the pulpit of our Congregational Chapel. I myself, her son, could see the dream peeping out, thrusting little

tendrils through her paved intention of having 'good sons'. It was my turn to be the 'good son'. It would be my son's turn to fulfil the other dream, or dreams: the secret ones.

Thank God I have no son to undertake the onerous burden. Oh, if only every father could say to his boy: Look here, my son! These are your grandmother's dreams of a man. Now you look out! - My dear old grandmother, my mother's mother, I'm sure she dreamed me almost to a *t*, except for a few details.

But the daughter starts, husbandly speaking, where the mother leaves off. The daughters of my mother, and of the mothers of my generation, start, as a rule, with 'good husbands', husbands who never fundamentally contradict them, whose lifelong attitude is: All right, dear! I know I'm wrong, as usual. This is the attitude of the husband of my generation.

It alters the position of the wife entirely. It is a fight for the woman to get the reins into her own hands, but once she's got them, there she is! the reins have got her. She's got to drive somewhere, to steer the matrimonial cart in some direction. 'All right, dear! I'll let you decide it, since you know better than I do!' says the husband, in every family matter. So she must keep on deciding. Or, if the husband balks her occasionally, she must keep up the pressure till he gives in.

Now driving the matrimonial cart is quite an adventure for a time, while the children are little, and all that. But later, the woman begins to think to herself: 'Oh, damn the cart! Where do I come in?' She begins to feel she's getting nothing out of it. It's not good enough. Whether you're the horse or whether you're the driver doesn't make any odds. So long as you're both harnessed to the cart.

Then the woman of my generation begins to have ideas

about her sons. They'd better not be so all-forsaken 'good' as their father has been. They'd better be more sporting, and give a woman a bit more 'life'. After all, what's a family? It swallows a woman up until she's fifty, and then puts the remains of her aside. Not good enough! No! My sons must be more manly, make plenty of money for a woman and give her a 'life', and not be such a muff about 'goodness' and being 'right'. What is being 'right', after all? Better enjoy yourself while you've got the chance.

So the sons of the younger generation emerge into the world – my sons, if I'd got any – with the intrinsic maternal charge ringing in their ears: 'Make some money and give yourself a good time – and all of us. Enjoy yourself!'

The young men of the younger generation begin to fulfil the hidden dreams of my mother. They are jazzy – but not coarse. They are a bit Don-Juanish, but, let us hope, entirely without brutality or vulgarity. They are more elegant, and not much more moral. But they are still humble before a woman, especially *the* woman!

It is the secret dream of my mother, coming true.

And if you want to know what the next generation will be like, you must fathom the secret dreams of your wife: the woman of forty or so. There you will find the clue. And if you want to be more precise, then find out what is the young woman of twenty's ideal of a man.

The poor young woman of twenty, she is rather stumped for an ideal of a man. So perhaps the next generation but one won't be anything at all.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. Even colliers are such stuff as their grandmothers' dreams are made on. And if Queen Victoria's dream was King George, then Queen Alexandra's was the Prince of Wales, and Queen Mary's will be – what?

But all this doesn't take away from the fact that my home



place is more depressing to me than death, and I wish my grandmother and all her generation had been better dreamers. 'Those maids, thank God, are 'neath the sod,' but their dreams we still have with us. It is a terrible thing to dream dreams that shall become flesh.

And when I see the young colliers dressed up like the Prince of Wales, dropping in to the Miners' Welfare for another drink, or into the 'Pally' for a dance – in evening suit to beat the band – or scooting down the black roads on a motor-bike, a leggy damsel behind – then I wish the mothers of my own generation, my own mother included, had been a little less *frivolous* as a dreamer. In life, so deadly earnest! And oh, what frivolous dreams our mothers must have had, as they sat in the pews of the Congregational Chapel with faces like saints! They must unconsciously have been dreaming jazz and short skirts, the Palais de Danse, the Film, and the motor-bike. It is enough to embitter one's most sacred memories. 'Lead Kindly Light' – unto the 'Pally'. The eleventh commandment: 'Enjoy yourselves!'

Well, well! Even grandmothers' dreams don't always come true, that is, they aren't allowed to. They'd come true right enough otherwise. But sometimes fate, and that long dragon the concatenation of circumstance, intervene. I am sure my mother never dreamed a dream that wasn't well-off. My poor old grandmother might still dream noble poverty – myself, to wit! But my mother? Impossible! In her secret dreams, the sleeve-links were solid gold, and the socks were silk.

And now fate, the monster, frustrates. The pits don't work. There's reduced wages and short pay. The young colliers will have a hard time buying another pair of silk socks for the 'Pally' when these are worn out. They'll have to go in wool. As for the young lady's fur coat – well, well!

let's hope it is seal, or some other hard-wearing skin, and not that evanescent chinchilla or squirrel that moults in a season.

For the young lady won't get another fur coat in a hurry, if she has to wait for her collier father to buy it. Not that he would refuse it her. What is a man for, except to provide for his wife and daughters? But you can't get blood out of a stone, nor cash out of a collier, not any more.

It is a soft, hazy October day, with the dark green Midlands fields looking somewhat sunken, and the oak trees brownish, the mean houses shabby and scaly, and the whole countryside somewhat dead, expunged, faintly blackened under the haze. It is a queer thing that countries die along with their inhabitants. This countryside is dead: or so inert, it is as good as dead. The old sheep-bridge where I used to swing as a boy is now an iron affair. The brook where we caught minnows now runs on a concrete bed. The old sheep-dip, the dipping-hole, as we called it, where we bathed, has somehow disappeared, so has the mill-dam and the little water-fall. It's all a concrete arrangement now, like a sewer. And the people's lives are the same, all running in concrete channels like a vast cloaca.

At Engine Lane Crossing, where I used to sit as a tiny child and watch the trucks shunting with a huge grey horse and a man with a pole, there are now no trucks. It is October, and there should be hundreds. But there are no orders. The pits are turning half-time. Today they are not turning at all. The men are all at home: no orders, no work.

And the pit is fuming silently, there is no rattle of screens, and the head-stock wheels are still. That was always an ominous sign, except on Sundays: even when I was a small child. The head-stock wheels twinkling against the sky, that meant work and life, men 'earning a living', if living can be earned.

But the pit is foreign to me anyhow, so many new big buildings round it, electric plant and all the rest. It's a wonder even the shafts are the same. But they must be: the shafts where we used to watch the cage-loads of colliers coming up suddenly, with a start: then the men streaming out to turn in their lamps, then trailing off, all grey, along the lane home; while the screens still rattled, and the pony on the sky-line still pulled along the tub of 'dirt', to tip over the edge of the pit-bank.

It is different now: all is much more impersonal and mechanical and abstract. I don't suppose the children of today drop 'nuts' of coal down the shaft, on Sunday afternoons, to hear them hit, hit with an awful resonance against the sides far down, before there comes the last final plump into the endlessly far-off sump. My father was always so angry if he knew we dropped coals down the shaft: If there was a man at t'bottom, it'd kill 'im straight off. How should you like that? - We didn't quite know how we should have liked it.

But anyhow Moorgreen is no more what it was: or it is too much more. Even the rose-bay willow-herb, which seems to love collieries, no longer showed its hairy autumn thickets and its last few spikes of rose around the pit-pond and on the banks. Only the yellow snapdragon, toad-flax, still was there.

Up from Moorgreen goes a footpath past the quarry and up the fields, out to Renshaw's farm. This was always a favourite walk of mine. Beside the path lies the old quarry, part of it very old and deep and filled in with oak trees and guelder-rose and tangle of briars, the other part open, with square wall neatly built up with dry-stone on the side under the plough-fields, and the bed still fairly level and open. This open part of the quarry was blue with dog-violets in spring, and, on the smallish brambles, the first handsome

blackberries came in autumn. Thank heaven, it is late October, and too late for blackberries, or there would still be here some wretched men with baskets, ignominiously combing the brambles for the last berry. When I was a boy, how a man, a full-grown miner, would have been despised for going with a little basket lousing the hedges for a blackberry or two. But the men of my generation put their pride in their pocket, and now their pockets are empty.

The quarry was a haunt of mine, as a boy. I loved it because, in the open part, it seemed so sunny and dry and warm, the pale stone, the pale, slightly sandy bed, the dog-violets and the early daisies. And then the old part, the deep part, was such a fearsome place. It was always dark – you had to crawl under bushes. And you came upon honeysuckle and nightshade, that no one ever looked upon. And at the dark sides were little, awful rocky caves, in which I imagined the adders lived.

There was a legend that these little caves or niches in the rocks were ‘everlasting wells’, like the everlasting wells at Matlock. At Matlock the water drips in caves, and if you put an apple in there, or a bunch of grapes, or even if you cut your hand off and put it in, it won’t decay, it will turn everlasting. Even if you put a bunch of violets in, they won’t die, they’ll turn everlasting.

Later, when I grew up and went to Matlock – only sixteen miles away – and saw the infamous everlasting wells, that the water only made a hoary nasty crust of stone on everything, and the stone hand was only a glove stuffed with sand, being ‘petrified’, I was disgusted. But still, when I see the stone fruits that people have in bowls for decoration, purple, semi-translucent stone grapes, and lemons, I think: *these* are the real fruits from the everlasting wells.

In the soft, still afternoon I found the quarry not very

much changed. The red berries shone quietly on the briars. And in this still, warm, secret place of the earth I felt my old childish longing to pass through a gate, into a deeper, sunnier, more silent world.

The sun shone in, but the shadows already were deep. Yet I had to creep away into the darkness of bushes, into the lower hollow of the tree-filled quarry. I felt, as I had always felt, there was something there. And as I wound my way, stooping, through the unpleasant tangle, I started, hearing a sudden rush and clatter of falling earth. Some part of the quarry must be giving way.

I found the place, away at the depth under the trees and bushes, a new place where yellow earth and whitish earth and pale rock had slid down new in a heap. And at the top of the heap was a crack, a little slantingly upright slit or orifice in the rock.

I looked at the new place curiously, the pallid new earth and rock among the jungle of vegetation, the little opening above, into the earth. A touch of sunlight came through the oak-leaves and fell on the new place and the aperture, and the place flashed and twinkled. I had to climb up to look at it.

It was a little crystalline cavity in the rock, all crystal, a little pocket or womb of quartz, among the common stone. It was pale and colourless, the stuff we call spar, from which they make little bowls and mementoes, in Matlock. But through the flat-edged, colourless crystal of the spar ran a broad vein of purplish crystal, wavering inwards as if it were arterial. And that was a vein of the Blue John spar that is rather precious.

The place fascinated me, especially the vein of purple, and I had to clamber into the tiny cave, which would just hold me. It seemed warm in there, as if the shiny rock were warm and alive, and it seemed to me there was a strange perfume,

of rock, of living rock like hard, bright flesh, faintly perfumed with phlox. It was a subtle yet most fascinating secret perfume, an inward perfume. I crept right into the little cavity, into the narrow inner end where the vein of purple ran, and I curled up there, like an animal in its hole. 'Now,' I thought, 'for a little while I am safe and sound, and the vulgar world doesn't exist for me.' I curled together with soft, curious voluptuousness. The scent of inwardness and of life, a queer scent like phlox, with a faint narcotic inner quality like opium or like truffles, became very vivid to me, then faded. I suppose I must have gone to sleep.

Later, I don't know how much later, it may have been a minute, or an eternity, I was wakened by feeling something lifting me, lifting me with a queer, half-sickening motion, curiously exciting, in a slow little rhythmic heave that was at once soft and powerful, gentle and violent, grateful and violating. I could do nothing, not even wake up: yet I was not really terrified, only utterly wonderstruck.

Then the lifting and heaving ceased, and I was cold. Something harsh passed over me: I realized it was my face: I realized I had a face. Then immediately a sharpness and bitingness flew into me, flew right into me, through what must have been my nostrils, into my body, what must have been my breast. Roused by a terrific shock of amazement, suddenly a new thing rushed into me, right into me, with a sweep that swept me away, and at the same time I felt that first thing moving somewhere in me, there was a movement that came aloud.

There were some dizzy moments when my I, my consciousness, wheeled and swooped like an eagle that is going to wheel away into the sky and be gone. Yet I felt her, my I, my life, wheeling closer, closer, my consciousness. And suddenly she closed with me, and I knew, I came awake.

I knew. I knew I was alive. I even heard a voice say: 'He's alive!' Those were the first words I heard.

And I opened my eyes again and blinked with terror, knowing the light of day. I shut them again, and felt sensations out in space, somewhere, and yet upon *me*. Again my eyes were opened, and I even saw objects, great things that were here and were there and then were not there. And the sensations out in space drew nearer, as it were, to me, the middle me.

So consciousness swooped and swerved, returning in great swoops. I realized that I was I, and that this I was also a body that ended abruptly in feet and hands. Feet! yes, feet! I remembered even the word. Feet!

I roused a little, and saw a greyish pale nearness that I recognized was my body, and something terrible moving upon it and making sensations in it. Why was it grey, my own nearness? Then I felt that other sensation, that I call aloudness, and I knew it. It was 'Dust of ages!' That was the aloudness: 'Dust of ages!'

In another instant I knew that violent movingness that was making sensations away out upon me. It was somebody. In terror and wonder the realization came to me: it was somebody, another one, a man. A man, making sensations on me! A man, who made the aloudness: 'Dust of ages.' A man! Still I could not grasp it. The conception would not return whole to me.

Yet once it had lodged within me, my consciousness established itself. I moved. I even moved my legs, my far-off feet. Yes! And an aloudness came out of me, even of me. I knew. I even knew now that I had a throat. And in another moment I should know something else.

It came all of a sudden. I saw the man's face. I saw it, a ruddy sort of face with a nose and a trimmed beard. I even knew more. I said: 'Why -?'

And the face quickly looked at me, with blue eyes into my eyes, and I struggled as if to get up.

'Art awake?' it said.

And somewhere, I knew there was the word Yes! But it had not yet come to me.

But I knew, I knew! Dimly I came to know that I was lying in sun on new earth that was spilled before my little, opened cave. I remembered my cave. But why I should be lying grey and stark-naked on earth in the sun outside I did not know; nor what the face was, nor whose.

Then there was more aloudness, and there was another one. I realized there could be more than one other one. More than one! More than one! I felt a new sudden something that made all of me move at once, in many directions, it seemed, and I became once more aware of the extent of me, and an aloudness came from my throat. And I remembered even that new something that was upon me. Many sensations galloping in all directions! But it was one dominant, drowning. It was water. Water! I even remembered water, or I knew I knew it. They were washing me. I even looked down and saw the whiteness: me, myself, white, a body.

And I remembered, that when all of me had moved to the touch of water, and I had made an aloudness in my throat, the men had laughed. Laughed! I remembered laughter.

So as they washed me, I came to myself. I even sat up. And I saw earth and rock, and a sky that I knew was afternoon. And I was stark-naked, and there were two men washing me, and they too were stark-naked. But I was white, pure white, and thin, and they were ruddy, and not thin.

They lifted me, and I leaned on one, standing, while the



other washed me. The one I leaned on was warm, and his life softly warmed me. The other one rubbed me gently. I was alive. I saw my white feet like two curious flowers, and I lifted them one after another, remembering walking.

The one held me, and the other put a woollen shirt or smock over me. It was pale grey and red. Then they fastened shoes on my feet. Then the free one went to the cave, peering, and he came back with things in his hands: buttons, some discoloured yet unwasted coins, a dull but not rusted pocket-knife, a waistcoat buckle, and a discoloured watch, whose very face was dark. Yet I knew these things were mine.

‘Where are my clothes?’ I said.

I felt eyes looking at me, two blue eyes, two brown eyes, full of strange life.

‘My clothes!’ I said.

They looked at one another, and made strange speech. Then the blue-eyed one said to me:

‘Gone! Dust of ages!’

They were strange men to me, with their formal, peaceful faces and trimmed beards, like old Egyptians. The one on whom I was unconsciously leaning stood quite still, and he was warmer than the afternoon sunshine. He seemed to give off life to me, I felt a warmth suffusing into me, an inflooding of strength. My heart began to lift with strange, exultant strength. I turned to look at the man I was resting on, and met the blue, quiet shimmer of his eyes. He said something to me, in the quiet, full voice, and I nearly understood, because it was like the dialect. He said it again, softly and calmly, speaking to the inside of me, so that I understood as a dog understands, from the voice, not from the words.

‘Can ta goo, o shollt be carried?’

It sounded to me like that, like the dialect.

'I think I can walk,' said I, in a voice that sounded harsh after the soft, deep modulation of the other.

He went slowly down the heap of loose earth and stones, which I remembered had fallen. But it was different. There were no trees in an old quarry hollow. This place was bare, like a new working. And when we came out, it was another place altogether. Below was a hollow of trees, and a bare, grassy hillside swept away, with clumps of trees, like park-land. There was no colliery, no railway, no hedges, no square, shut-in fields. And yet the land looked tended.

We stood on a little path of paved stone, only about a yard wide. Then the other man came up from the quarry, carrying tools and wearing a grey shirt or smock with a red cord. He spoke with that curious soft inwardness, and we turned down the path, myself still leaning on the shoulder of the first man. I felt myself quivering with a new strength, and yet ghostlike. I had a curious sensation of lightness, not touching the ground as I walked, as if my hand that rested on the man's shoulder buoyed me up. I wanted to know whether I was really buoyant, as in a dream.

I took my hand suddenly from the man's shoulder, and stood still. He turned and looked at me.

'I can walk alone,' I said, and as in a dream I took a few paces forward. It was true. I was filled with a curious rushing strength that made me almost buoyant, scarcely needing to touch the ground. I was curiously, quiveringly strong, and at the same time buoyant.

'I can go alone!' I said to the man.

They seemed to understand, and to smile, the blue-eyed one showing his teeth when he smiled. I had a sudden idea: How beautiful they are, like plants in flower! But still, it was something I felt, rather than saw.

The blue-eyed one went in front, and I walked on the

narrow path with my rushing buoyancy, terribly elated and proud, forgetting everything, the other man following silently behind. Then I was aware that the path had turned and ran beside a road in a hollow where a stream was, and a cart was clanking slowly ahead, drawn by two oxen and led by a man who was entirely naked.

I stood still, on the raised, paved path, trying to think, trying, as it were, to come awake. I was aware that the sun was sinking behind me, golden in the October afternoon. I was aware that the man in front of me also had no clothes on whatsoever, and he would soon be cold.

Then I made an effort, and looked round. On the slopes to the left were big, rectangular patches of dark ploughland. And men were ploughing still. On the right were hollow meadows, beyond the stream, with tufts of trees and many speckled cattle being slowly driven forwards. And in front the road swerved on, past a mill-pond and a mill, and a few little houses, and then swerved up a rather steep hill. And at the top of the hill was a town, all yellow in the late afternoon light, with yellow, curved walls rising massive from the yellow-leaved orchards, and above, buildings swerving in a long, oval curve, and round, faintly conical towers rearing up. It had something at once soft and majestic about it, with its soft yet powerful curves, and no sharp angles or edges, the whole substance seeming soft and golden like the golden flesh of a city.

And I knew, even while I looked at it, that it was the place where I was born, the ugly colliery townlet of dirty red brick. Even as a child, coming home from Moorgreen, I had looked up and seen the squares of miners' dwellings, built by the Company, rising from the hill-top in the afternoon light like the walls of Jerusalem, and I had wished it were a golden city, as in the hymns we sang in the Congregational Chapel.

Now it had come true. But the very realization, and the very intensity of my *looking*, had made me lose my strength and my buoyancy. I turned forlorn to the men who were with me. The blue-eyed one came and took my arm, and laid it across his shoulder, laying his left hand round my waist, on my hip.

And almost immediately the soft, warm rhythm of his life pervaded me again, and the memory in me which was my old self went to sleep. I was like a wound, and the touch of these men healed me at once. We went on again, along the raised pavement.

Three horsemen came cantering up, from behind. All the world was turning home towards the town, at sunset. The horsemen slackened pace as they came abreast. They were men in soft, yellow sleeveless tunics, with the same still, formal Egyptian faces and trimmed beards as my companions. Their arms and legs were bare, and they rode without stirrups. But they had curious hats of beech-leaves on their heads. They glanced at us sharply and my companions saluted respectfully. Then the riders cantered ahead again, the golden tunics softly fluttering. No one spoke at all. There was a great stillness in all the world, and yet a magic of close-interwoven life.

The road now began to be full of people, slowly passing up the hill towards the town. Most were bare-headed, wearing the sleeveless woollen shirt of grey and red, with a red girdle, but some were clean-shaven, and dressed in grey shirts, and some carried tools, some fodder. There were women too, in blue or lilac smocks, and some men in scarlet smocks. But among the rest, here and there were men like my guide, quite naked, and some young women, laughing together as they went, had their blue smocks folded to a pad on their heads, as they carried their bundles, and their slender, rosy-tanned bodies were quite naked,

save for a little girdle of white and green and purple cord fringe that hung round their hips and swung as they walked. Only they had soft shoes on their feet.

They all glanced at me, and some spoke a word of salute to my companions, but no one asked questions. The naked girls went very stately, with bundles on their heads, yet they laughed more than the men. And they were comely as berries on a bush. That was what they reminded me of: rose-berries on a bush. That was the quality of all the people: an inner stillness and ease, like plants that come to flower and fruit. The individual was like a whole fruit, body and mind and spirit, without split. It made me feel a curious, sad sort of envy, because I was not so whole, and at the same time, I was wildly elated, my rushing sort of energy seemed to come upon me again. I felt as if I were just going to plunge into the deeps of life, for the first time: belated, and yet a pioneer of pioneers.

I saw ahead the great rampart walls of the town – then the road suddenly curved to gateway, all the people flowing in, in two slow streams, through the narrow side entrances.

It was a big gateway of yellow stone, and inside was a clear space, paved mostly with whitish stones, and around it stood buildings in the yellow stone, golden-looking, with pavement arcades supported on yellow pillars. My guides turned into a chamber where men in green stood on guard, and several peasants were waiting. They made way, and I was taken before a man who reclined on a dark-yellow couch, himself wearing a yellow tunic. He was blond, with the trimmed beard and hair worn long, cut round like the hair of a Florentine page. Though he was not handsome, he had a curious quality of beauty, that came from within. But this time, it was the beauty of a flower rather than of a berry.

My guides saluted him and explained briefly and quietly, in words I could only catch a drift of. Then the man looked at me, quietly, gently, yet I should have been afraid, if I had been his enemy. He spoke to me, and I thought he asked if I wanted to stay in their town.

‘Did you ask me if I want to stay here?’ I replied. ‘You see, I don’t even know where I am.’

‘You are in this town of Nethrupp,’ he said, in slow English, like a foreigner. ‘Will you stay some time with us?’

‘Why, thank you, if I may,’ I said, too helplessly bewildered to know what I was saying.

We were dismissed, with one of the guards in green. The people were all streaming down the side street, between the yellow-coloured houses, some going under the pillared porticoes, some in the open road. Somewhere ahead a wild music began to ring out, like three bagpipes squealing and droning. The people pressed forward, and we came to a great oval space on the ramparts, facing due west. The sun, a red ball, was near the horizon.

We turned into a wide entrance and went up a flight of stairs. The man in green opened a door and ushered me in.

‘All is thine!’ he said.

My naked guide followed me into the room, which opened on to the oval and the west. He took a linen shirt and a woollen tunic from a small cupboard, and smilingly offered them to me. I realized he wanted his own shirt back, and quickly gave it him, and his shoes. He put my hand quickly between his two hands, then slipped into his shirt and shoes, and was gone.

I dressed myself in the clothes he had laid out, a blue-and-white striped tunic, and white stockings, and blue cloth shoes, and went to the window. The red sun was almost touching the tips of the tree-covered hills away in

the west, Sherwood Forest grown dense again. It was the landscape I knew best on earth, and still I knew it, from the shapes.

There was a curious stillness in the square. I stepped out of my window on to the terrace, and looked down. The crowd had gathered in order, a cluster of men on the left, in grey, grey-and-scarlet, and pure scarlet, and a cluster of women on the right, in tunics of all shades of blue and crocus lilac. In the vaulted porticoes were more people. And the red sun shone on all, till the square glowed again.

When the ball of fire touched the tree-tops, there was a queer squeal of bagpipes, and the square suddenly started into life. The men were stamping softly, like bulls, the women were softly swaying, and softly clapping their hands, with a strange noise, like leaves. And from under the vaulted porticoes, at opposite ends of the egg-shaped oval, came the soft booming and trilling of women and men singing against one another in the strangest pattern of sound.

It was all kept very soft, soft-breathing. Yet the dance swept into swifter and swifter rhythm, with the most extraordinary incalculable unison. I do not believe there was any outside control of the dance. The thing happened by instinct, like the wheeling and flashing of a shoal of fish or of a flock of birds dipping and spreading in the sky. Suddenly, in one amazing wing-movement, the arms of all the men would flash up into the air, naked and glowing, and with the soft, rushing sound of pigeons alighting the men ebbed in a spiral, grey and sparkled with scarlet, bright arms slowly leaning, upon the women, who rustled all crocus-blue, rustled like an aspen, then in one movement scattered like sparks, in every direction, from under the enclosing, sinking arms of the men, and suddenly

formed slender rays of lilac branching out from red and grey knot of the men.

All the time the sun was slowly sinking, shadow was falling, and the dance was moving slower, the women wheeling blue around the obliterated sun. They were dancing the sun down, and dancing as birds wheel and dance, and fishes in shoals, controlled by some strange unanimous instinct. It was at once terrifying and magnificent, I wanted to die, so as not to see it, and I wanted to rush down, to be one of them. To be a drop in that wave of life.

The sun had gone, the dance unfolded and faced inwards to the town, the men softly stamping, the women rustling and softly clapping, the voices of the singers drifting on like a twining wind. And slowly, in one slow wing-movement, the arms of the men rose up unanimous, in a sort of salute, and as the arms of the men were sinking, the arms of the women softly rose. It gave the most marvellous impression of soft, slow flight of two many-pinioned wings, lifting and sinking like the slow drift of an owl. Then suddenly everything ceased. The people scattered silently.

And two men came into the oval, the one with glowing lamps hung on a pole he carried across his shoulder, while the other quickly hung up the lamps within the porticoes, to light the town. It was night.

Someone brought us a lighted lamp, and was gone. It was evening, and I was alone in a smallish room with a small bed, a lamp on the floor, and an unlighted fire of wood on the small hearth. It was very simple and natural. There was a small outfit of clothing in the cupboard, with a thick blue cloak. And there were a few plates and dishes. But in the room there were no chairs, but a long, folded piece of dark felt, on which one could recline. The light



shone upwards from below, lighting the walls of creamy smoothness, like a chalk enamel. And I was alone, utterly alone, within a couple of hundred yards of the very spot where I was born.

I was afraid: afraid for myself. These people, it seemed to me, were not people, not human beings in my sense of the word. They had the stillness and the completeness of plants. And see how they could melt into one amazing instinctive thing, a human flock of motion.

I sat on the ground on the dark-blue felt, wrapped in the blue mantle, because I was cold and had no means of lighting the fire. Someone tapped at the door, and a man of the green guard entered. He had the same quiet, fruit-like glow of the men who had found me, a quality of beauty that came from inside, in some queer physical way. It was a quality I loved, yet it made me angry. It made me feel like a green apple, as if they had had all the real sun.

He took me out, and showed me lavatories and baths, with two lusty men standing under the douches. Then he took me down to a big circular room with a raised hearth in the centre, and a blazing wood fire whose flame and smoke rose to a beautiful funnel-shaped canopy or chimney of stone. The hearth spread out beyond the canopy, and here some men reclined on the folded felts, with little white cloths before them, eating an evening meal of stiff porridge and milk, with liquid butter, fresh lettuce, and apples. They had taken off their clothes, and lay with the firelight flickering on their healthy, fruit-like bodies, the skin glistening faintly with oil. Around the circular wall ran a broad dais where other men reclined, either eating or resting. And from time to time a man came in with his food, or departed with his dishes.

My guide took me out, to peep in a steaming room where each man washed his plate and spoon and hung them in his

own little rack. Then my guide gave me a cloth and tray and dishes, and we went to a simple kitchen, where the porridge stood in great bowls over a slow fire, the melted butter was in a deep silver pan, the milk and the lettuce and fruit stood near the door. Three cooks guarded the kitchen, but the men from outside came quietly and took what they needed or what they wanted, helping themselves, then returning to the great round room, or going away to their own little rooms. There was an instinctive cleanliness and decency everywhere, in every movement, in every act. It was as if the deepest instinct had been cultivated in the people, to be comely. The soft, quiet comeliness was like a dream, a dream of life at last come true.

I took a little porridge, though I had little desire to eat. I felt a curious surge of force in me: yet I was like a ghost, among these people. My guide asked me, would I eat in the round hall, or go up to my room? I understood, and chose the round hall. So I hung my cloak in the curving lobby, and entered the men's hall. There I lay on a felt against the wall, and watched the men, and listened.

They seemed to slip out of their clothing as soon as they were warm, as if clothes were a burden or a slight humiliation. And they lay and talked softly, intermittently, with low laughter, and some played games with draughtsmen and chessmen, but mostly they were still.

The room was lit by hanging lamps, and it had no furniture at all. I was alone, and I was ashamed to take off my white sleeveless shirt. I felt, somehow, these men had no right to be so unashamed and self-possessed.

The green guard came again, and asked me, would I go to see somebody whose name I did not make out. So I took my mantle, and we went into the softly-lighted street, under the porticoes. People were passing, some in cloaks, some only in tunics, and women were tripping along.

We climbed up towards the top of the town, and I felt I must be passing the very place where I was born, near where the Wesleyan Chapel stood. But now it was all softly lighted, golden-coloured porticoes, with people passing in green or blue or grey-and-scarlet cloaks.

We came out on top into a circular space, it must have been where our Congregational Chapel stood, and in the centre of the circle rose a tower shaped tapering rather like a lighthouse, and rosy-coloured in the lamplight. Away in the sky, at the club-shaped tip of the tower, glowed one big ball of light.

We crossed, and mounted the steps of another building, through the great hall where people were passing, on to a door at the end of a corridor, where a green guard was seated. The guard rose and entered to announce us, then I followed through an antechamber to an inner room with a central hearth and a fire of clear-burning wood.

A man came forward to meet me, wearing a thin, carmine-coloured tunic. He had brown hair and a stiff, reddish-brown beard, and an extraordinary glimmering kind of beauty. Instead of the Egyptian calmness and fruit-like impassivity of the ordinary people, or the steady, flower-like radiance of the chieftain in yellow, at the city gates, this man had a quavering glimmer like light coming through water. He took my cloak from me; and I felt at once he understood.

‘It is perhaps cruel to awaken,’ he said, in slow, conscious English, ‘even at a good moment.’

‘Tell me where I am!’ I said.

‘We call it Nethrupp – but was it not Newthorpe? – Tell me, when did you go to sleep?’

‘This afternoon, it seems – in October, 1927.’

‘October, nineteen-twenty-seven!’ He repeated the words curiously, smiling.

‘Did I really sleep? Am I really awake?’

‘Are you not awake?’ he said smiling. ‘Will you recline upon the cushions? Or would you rather sit? See!’ – He showed me a solid oak armchair, of the modern furniture-revival sort, standing alone in the room. But it was black with age, and shrunken-seeming. I shivered.

‘How old is that chair?’ I said.

‘It is just about a thousand years! a case of special preservation,’ he said.

I could not help it. I just sat on the rugs and burst into tears, weeping my soul away.

The man sat perfectly still for a long time. Then he came and put my hand between his two.

‘Don’t cry!’ he said. ‘Don’t cry! Man was a perfect child so long. Now we try to be men, not fretful children. Don’t cry! Is not this better?’

‘When is it? What year is this?’ I asked.

‘What year? We call it the year of the acorn. But you mean its arithmetic? You would call it the year two thousand nine hundred and twenty-seven.’

‘It cannot be,’ I said.

‘Yet still it is.’

‘Then I am a thousand and forty-two years old!’

‘And why not?’

‘But how can I be?’

‘How? You went to sleep, like a chrysalis: in one of the earth’s little chrysalis wombs: and your clothes turned to dust, yet they left the buttons: and you woke up like a butterfly. But why not? Why are you afraid to be a butterfly that wakes up out of the dark for a little while, beautiful? Be beautiful, then, like a white butterfly. Take off your clothes and let the firelight fall on you. What is given, accept then –’

‘How long shall I live now, do you think?’ I asked him.

A DREAM OF LIFE

‘Why will you always measure? Life is not a clock.’

It is true. I am like a butterfly, and I shall only live a little while. That is why I don’t want to eat.

*(Unfinished)*

## *The Undying Man*

LONG ago in Spain there were two very learned men, so clever and knowing so much that they were famous all over the world. One was called Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a Jew – blessed be his memory! – and the other was called Aristotle, a Christian who belonged to the Greeks.

These two were great friends, because they had always studied together and found out many things together. At last after many years, they found out a thing they had been specially trying for. They discovered that if you took a tiny little vein out of a man's body, and put it in a glass jar with certain leaves and plants, it would gradually begin to grow, and would grow and grow until it became a man. When it had grown as big as a boy, you could take it out of the jar, and then it would live and keep on growing till it became a man, a fine man who would never die. He would be undying. Because he had never been born, he would never die, but live for ever and ever. Because the wisest men on earth had made him, and he didn't have to be born.

When they were quite sure it was so, then the Rabbi Moses Maimonides and the Christian Aristotle decided they would really make a man. Up till then, they had only experimented. But now they would make the real undying man.

The question was, from whom should they take the little vein? Because the man they took it from would die. So at first they decided to take it from a slave. But then they thought, a slave wasn't good enough to make the beginnings of the undying man. So they decided to ask one of their devoted students to sacrifice himself. But that did not

When he came to himself, the room was dusk, it was almost night. And Rabbi Moses Maimonides was afraid. He did not know what he was afraid of. He rose to his feet, and glanced towards the jar. And it seemed to him, in the darkness on the shelf there was a tiny red glow, like the smallest ember of fire. But it did not go out, as the last ember of fire goes out while you watch. It stayed on, and glowed a tiny dying glow that did not die. Then he knew he saw the glow of the life of the undying man, and he was afraid.

He locked his room, where no one ever entered but himself, and went out into the town. People greeted him with bows and reverences, for he was the most learned of all rabbis. But tonight they all seemed very far from him. They looked small and they grimaced like monkeys in his eyes. And he thought to himself: they will all die! They grimace in this fashion, like monkeys, because they will all die. Only I shall not die!

But as he thought this, his heart stood still, because he knew that he too would die. He stood still in the street, though rain was falling, and people crept past him humbly, thinking he was praying some great prayer. But he was only locked in this one thought: I shall die and pass away, but that little red spark which came from Aristotle the Christian, it will never die. It will live for ever and ever, like God. God alone lives for ever and ever. But this man in the jar will also live for ever and ever, even that red spark. He will be a man, and live for ever and ever, as good as God. Nay, better than God! For surely, to be as good as God, and to be also a man and alive, that would be better even than being God!

Rabbi Moses Maimonides started at this thought as if he had been stung. And immediately he began to walk down the street towards home, to see if the red glow were really

glowing. When he got to his door, he stood still, afraid to open. He could not open.

So suddenly he cried a great fierce cry to God, to help him and His people. A great fierce cry for help. For they were God's people, God's chosen people. Though they grimaced in the sight of Rabbi Moses Maimonides like monkeys, they were beautiful in the sight of God, and the best Jews among them would sit in high, high places in the eternal glory of God, in the after-life.

This thought so emboldened Maimonides that he opened his door and entered his room. But he stood again as if pierced through the body by that strange red light, like no light of God, which glowed so tiny and yet was so fierce and strong. 'Fierce and strong! fierce and strong!' he kept muttering to himself as he paced back and forth in his room. 'Fierce and strong!' His servant thought he was praying, and she dared not bring his food to the door. 'Fierce and strong!' – he paced back and forth. And he himself thought he was praying. He was so used to praying the ritual prayers as he paced in his room, that now he thought he was praying to the one and only God. But in fact, all he was saying was 'Fierce and strong! Fierce and strong!'

At last he sank down in exhaustion, and then his woman tapped at his door and set down the tray. But he told her to take the tray away, he would not eat in his room, but would come downstairs. For he could not eat in the presence of that little red glow.

So he made his ablutions and went downstairs and ate. And he slept in the guest-room, for he could not sleep in the presence of the little red glow. Indeed he could not sleep at all, but lay and groaned in spirit, thinking of that little red light which alone of all light was not the light of God. And he knew it would grow and grow, and be a man,



most splendid, a man who would never die. And all the people would think: What is the most wonderful of all things, seen or unseen? – And there would come the

*(Unfinished)*

## *Love Among the Haystacks*

### I

THE two large fields lay on a hillside facing south. Being newly cleared of hay, they were golden green, and they shone almost blindingly in the sunlight. Across the hill, half-way up, ran a high hedge, that flung its black shadow finely across the molten glow of the sward. The stack was being built just above the hedge. It was of great size, massive, but so silvery and delicately bright in tone that it seemed not to have weight. It rose dishevelled and radiant among the steady, golden-green glare of the field. A little farther back was another, finished stack.

The empty wagon was just passing through the gap in the hedge. From the far-off corner of the bottom field, where the sward was still striped grey with winrows, the loaded wagon launched forward to climb the hill to the stack. The white dots of the hay-makers showed distinctly among the hay.

The two brothers were having a moment's rest, waiting for the load to come up. They stood wiping their brows with their arms, sighing from the heat and the labour of placing the last load. The stack they rode was high, lifting them up above the hedge-tops, and very broad, a great slightly-hollowed vessel into which the sunlight poured, in which the hot, sweet scent of hay was suffocating. Small and inefficacious the brothers looked, half-submerged in the loose, great trough, lifted high up as if on an altar reared to the sun.

Maurice, the younger brother, was a handsome young fellow of twenty-one, careless and debonair, and full of vigour. His grey eyes, as he taunted his brother, were bright and baffled with a strong emotion. His swarthy face had the same peculiar smile, expectant and glad and nervous, of a young man roused for the first time in passion.

'Tha sees,' he said, as he leaned on the pommel of his fork, 'tha thowt as tha'd done me one, didna ter?' He smiled as he spoke, then fell again into his pleasant torment of musing.

'I thought nowt – tha knows so much,' retorted Geoffrey, with the touch of a sneer. His brother had the better of him. Geoffrey was a very heavy, hulking fellow, a year older than Maurice. His blue eyes were unsteady, they glanced away quickly; his mouth was morbidly sensitive. One felt him wince away, through the whole of his great body. His inflated self-consciousness was a disease in him.

'Ah, but though, I know tha did,' mocked Maurice. 'Tha went slinkin' off' – Geoffrey winced convulsively – 'thinking as that wor the last night as any of us'ud ha'e ter stop here, an' so tha'd leave me to sleep out, though it wor thy turn –'

He smiled to himself, thinking of the result of Geoffrey's ruse.

'I didna go slinkin' off neither,' retorted Geoffrey, in his heavy, clumsy manner, wincing at the phrase. 'Didna my feyther send me to fetch some coal –'

'Oh yes, oh yes – we know all about it. But tha sees what tha missed, my lad.'

Maurice, chuckling, threw himself on his back in the bed of hay. There was absolutely nothing in his world, then, except the shallow ramparts of the stack, and the blazing sky. He clenched his fists tight, threw his arms across his face, and braced his muscles again. He was evidently very much moved, so acutely that it was hardly pleasant, though he still smiled. Geoffrey, standing behind him, could just see his red mouth, with the young moustache like black fur, curling back and showing the teeth in a smile. The elder brother leaned his chin on the pommel of his fork, looking out across the country.

Far away was the faint blue heap of Nottingham. Between, the country lay under a haze of heat, with here and there a flag of colliery smoke waving. But near at hand, at the foot of the hill, across the deep-hedged high road, was only the silence of the old church and the castle farm, among their trees. The large view only made Geoffrey more sick. He looked away, to the wagons crossing the field below him, the empty cart like a big insect moving down-hill, the load coming up, rocking like a ship, the brown head of the horse

ducking, the brown knees lifted and planted strenuously. Geoffrey wished it would be quick.

'Tha didna think—'

Geoffrey started, coiled within himself, and looked down at the handsome lips moving in speech below the brown arms of his brother.

'Tha didna think 'er'd be thur wi' me — or tha wouldna ha' left me to it,' Maurice said, ending with a little laugh of excited memory. Geoffrey flushed with hate, and had an impulse to set his foot on that moving, taunting mouth, which was there below him. There was silence for a time, then, in a peculiar tone of delight, Maurice's voice came again, spelling out the words, as it were:

*'Ich bin klein, mein Herz ist rein,  
Ist niemand d'rin als Christ allein.'*

Maurice chuckled, then, convulsed at a twinge of recollection, keen as pain, he twisted over, pressed himself into the hay.

'Can thee say thy prayers in German?' came his muffled voice.

'I non want,' growled Geoffrey.

Maurice chuckled. His face was quite hidden, and in the dark he was going over again his last night's experiences.

'What about kissing 'er under th' ear, Sonny,' he said, in a curious, uneasy tone. He writhed, still startled and inflamed by his first contact with love.

Geoffrey's heart swelled within him, and things went dark. He could not see the landscape.

'An' there's just a nice two-handful of her bosom,' came the low, provocative tones of Maurice, who seemed to be talking to himself.

The two brothers were both fiercely shy of women, and until this hay harvest, the whole feminine sex had been represented by their mother and in presence of any other women they were dumb louts. Moreover, brought up by a proud mother, a stranger in the country, they held the common girls as beneath them, because beneath their mother,

who spoke pure English, and was very quiet. Loud-mouthed and broad-tongued the common girls were. So these two young men had grown up virgin but tormented.

Now again Maurice had the start of Geoffrey, and the elder brother was deeply mortified. There was a danger of his sinking into a morbid state, from sheer lack of living, lack of interest. The foreign governess at the Vicarage, whose garden lay beside the top field, had talked to the lads through the hedge, and had fascinated them. There was a great elder bush, with its broad creamy flowers crumbling on to the garden path, and into the field. Geoffrey never smelled elder-flower without starting and wincing, thinking of the strange foreign voice that had so startled him as he mowed out with the scythe in the hedge bottom. A baby had run through the gap, and the *Fräulein*, calling in German, had come brushing down the flowers in pursuit. She had started so on seeing a man standing there in the shade, that for a moment she could not move: and then she had blundered into the rake which was lying by his side. Geoffrey, forgetting she was a woman when he saw her pitch forward, had picked her up carefully, asking: 'Have you hurt you?'

Then she had broken into a laugh, and answered in German, showing him her arms, and knitting her brows. She was nettled rather badly.

'You want a dock leaf,' he said. She frowned in a puzzled fashion.

'A dock leaf?' she repeated. He had rubbed her arms with the green leaf.

And now, she had taken to Maurice. She had seemed to prefer himself at first. Now she had sat with Maurice in the moonlight, and had let him kiss her. Geoffrey sullenly suffered, making no fight.

Unconsciously, he was looking at the Vicarage garden. There she was, in a golden-brown dress. He took off his hat, and held up his right hand in greeting to her. She, a small, golden figure, waved her hand negligently from among the potato rows. He remained, arrested, in the same posture, his

hat in his left hand, his right arm upraised, thinking. He could tell by the negligence of her greeting that she was waiting for Maurice. What did she think of himself? Why wouldn't she have him?

Hearing the voice of the wagoner leading the load, Maurice rose. Geoffrey still stood in the same way, but his face was sullen, and his upraised hand was slack with brooding. Maurice faced up-hill. His eyes lit up and he laughed. Geoffrey dropped his own arm, watching.

'Lad!' chuckled Maurice. 'I non knowed 'er wor there.' He waved his hand clumsily. In these matters Geoffrey did better. The elder brother watched the girl. She ran to the end of the path, behind the bushes, so that she was screened from the house. Then she waved her handkerchief wildly. Maurice did not notice the manoeuvre. There was the cry of a child. The girl's figure vanished, reappeared holding up a white childish bundle, and came down the path. There she put down her charge, sped up-hill to a great ash tree, climbed quickly to a large horizontal bar that formed the fence there, and, standing poised, blew kisses with both her hands, in a foreign fashion that excited the brothers. Maurice laughed aloud, as he waved his red handkerchief.

'Well, what's the danger?' shouted a mocking voice from below. Maurice collapsed, blushing furiously.

'Nowt!' he called.

There was a hearty laugh from below.

The load rode up, sheered with a hiss against the stack, then sank back again upon the scotches. The brothers ploughed across the mass of hay, taking the forks. Presently a big burly man, red and glistening, climbed to the top of the load. Then he turned round, scrutinized the hillside from under his shaggy brows. He caught sight of the girl under the ash tree.

'Oh, that's who it is,' he laughed. 'I thought it was some such bird, but I couldn't see her.'

The father laughed in a hearty, chaffing way, then began to teem the load. Geoffrey, on the stack above, received his great forkfuls, and swung them over to Maurice, who took

them, placed them, building the stack. In the intense sunlight, the three worked in silence, knit together in a brief passion of work. The father stirred slowly for a moment, getting the hay from under his feet. Geoffrey waited, the blue tines of his fork glittering in expectation: the mass rose, his fork swung beneath it, there was a light clash of blades, then the hay was swept on to the stack, caught by Maurice, who placed it judiciously. One after another, the shoulders of the three men bowed and braced themselves. All wore light blue, bleached shirts, that stuck close to their backs. The father moved mechanically, his thick, rounded shoulders bending and lifting dully: he worked monotonously. Geoffrey flung away his strength. His massive shoulders swept and flung the hay extravagantly.

'Dost want to knock me ower?' asked Maurice angrily. He had to brace himself against the impact. The three men worked intensely, as if some will urged them. Maurice was light and swift at the work, but he had to use his judgement. Also, when he has to place the hay along the far ends, he had some distance to carry it. So he was too slow for Geoffrey. Ordinarily, the elder would have placed the hay as far as possible where his brother wanted it. Now, however, he pitched his forkfuls into the middle of the stack. Maurice strode swiftly and handsomely across the bed, but the work was too much for him. The other two men, clenched in their receive and deliver, kept up a high pitch of labour. Geoffrey still flung the hay at random. Maurice was perspiring heavily with heat and exertion, and was getting worried. Now and again, Geoffrey wiped his arm across his brow, mechanically, like a animal. Then he glanced with satisfaction at Maurice's moiled condition, and caught the next forkful.

'Wheer dost think thou'rt hollin' it, fool!' panted Maurice, as his brother flung a forkful out of reach.

'Wheer I've a mind,' answered Geoffrey.

Maurice toiled on, now very angry. He felt the sweat trickling down his body: drops fell into his long black lashes, blinding him, so that he had to stop and angrily dash his eyes clear. The veins stood out in his swarthy neck. He felt he

would burst, or drop, if the work did not soon slacken off. He heard his father's fork dully scrape the cart bottom.

'There, the last,' the father panted. Geoffrey tossed the last light lot at random, took off his hat, and, steaming in the sunshine as he wiped himself, stood complacently watching Maurice struggle with clearing the bed.

'Don't you think you've got your bottom corner a bit far out?' came the father's voice from below. 'You'd better be drawing in now, hadn't you?'

'I thought you said next load,' Maurice called sulkily.

'Aye! All right. But isn't this bottom corner - ?'

Maurice, impatient, took no notice.

Geoffrey strode over the stack, and stuck his fork in the offending corner. 'What - here?' he bawled in his great voice.

'Aye - isn't it a bit loose?' came the irritating voice.

Geoffrey pushed his fork in the jutting corner, and, leaning his weight on the handle, shoved. He thought it shook. He thrust again with all his power. The mass swayed.

'What art up to, tha fool!' cried Maurice, in a high voice.

'Mind who tha'rt callin' a fool,' said Geoffrey, and he prepared to push again. Maurice sprang across, and elbowed his brother aside. On the yielding, swaying bed of hay, Geoffrey lost his foothold and fell grovelling. Maurice tried the corner.

'It's solid enough,' he shouted angrily.

'Aye - all right,' came the conciliatory voice of the father; 'you do get a bit of rest now there's such a long way to cart it,' he added reflectively.

Geoffrey had got to his feet.

'Tha'll mind who tha'rt nudging, I can tell thee,' he threatened heavily; adding, as Maurice continued to work, 'an' tha non ca's him a fool again, dost hear?'

'Not till next time,' sneered Maurice.

As he worked silently round the stack, he neared where his brother stood like a sullen statue, leaning on his fork-handle, looking out over the countryside. Maurice's heart quickened in its beat. He worked forward, until a point of his fork



caught in the leather of Geoffrey's boot, and the metal rang sharply.

'Are ter going ta shift thysen?' asked Maurice threateningly. There was no reply from the great block. Maurice lifted his upper lip like a dog. Then he put out his elbow and tried to push his brother into the stack, clear of his way.

'Who are ter shovin'?' came the deep, dangerous voice.

'Thaigh,' replied Maurice, with a sneer, and straightway the two brothers set themselves against each other, like opposing bulls, Maurice trying his hardest to shift Geoffrey from his footing, Geoffrey leaning all his weight in resistance. Maurice, insecure in his footing, staggered a little, and Geoffrey's weight followed him. He went slithering over the edge of the stack.

Geoffrey turned white to the lips, and remained standing, listening. He heard the fall. Then a flush of darkness came over him, and he remained standing only because he was planted. He had not strength to move. He could hear no sound from below, was only faintly aware of a sharp shriek from a long way off. He listened again. Then he filled with sudden panic.

'Feyther!' he roared, in his tremendous voice. 'Feyther! Feyther!'

The valley re-echoed with the sound. Small cattle on the hillside looked up. Men's figures came running from the bottom field, and much nearer a woman's figure was racing across the upper field. Geoffrey waited in terrible suspense.

'Ah-h!' he heard the strange, wild voice of the girl cry out. 'Ah-h!' - and then some foreign wailing speech. Then: 'Ah-h! Are you dea-ed!'

He stood sullenly erect on the stack, not daring to go down, longing to hide in the hay, but too sullen to stoop out of sight. He heard his eldest brother come up, panting:

'Whatever's amiss!' and then the labourer, and then his father.

'Whatever have you been doing?' he heard his father ask, while yet he had not come round the corner of the stack. And then, in a low, bitter tone:

'Eh, he's done for! I'd no business to ha' put it all on that stack.'

There was a moment or two of silence, then the voice of Henry, the eldest brother, said crisply:

'He's not dead - he's coming round.'

Geoffrey heard, but was not glad. He had as lief Maurice were dead. At least that would be final: better than meeting his brother's charges, and of seeing his mother pass to the sick-room. If Maurice was killed, he himself would not explain, no, not a word, and they could hang him if they liked. If Maurice were only hurt, then everybody would know, and Geoffrey could never lift his face again. What added torture, to pass along, everybody knowing. He wanted something that he could stand back to, something definite, if it were only the knowledge that he had killed his brother. He *must* have something firm to back up to, or he would go mad. He was so lonely, he who above all needed the support of sympathy.

'No, he's commin' to; I tell you he is,' said the labourer.

'He's not dea-ed, he's not dea-ed,' came the passionate, strange sing-song of the foreign girl. 'He's not dead - no-o.'

'He wants some brandy - look at the colour of his lips,' said the crisp, cold voice of Henry. 'Can you fetch some?'

'Wha-at? Fetch?' Fräulein did not understand.

'Brandy,' said Henry, very distinct.

'Brrandy!' she re-echoed.

'You go, Bill,' groaned the father.

'Aye, I'll go,' replied Bill, and he ran across the field.

Maurice was not dead, nor going to die. This Geoffrey now realized. He was glad after all that the extreme penalty was revoked. But he hated to think of himself going on. He would always shrink now. He had hoped and hoped for the time when he would be careless, bold as Maurice, when he would not wince and shrink. Now he would always be the same, coiling up in himself like a tortoise with no shell.

'Ah-h! He's getting better!' came the wild voice of the Fräulein, and she began to cry, a strange sound, that startled the men, made the animal bristle within them. Geoffrey

shuddered as he heard, between her sobbing, the impatient moaning of his brother as the breath came back.

The labourer returned at a run, followed by the Vicar. After the brandy, Maurice made more moaning, hiccuping noise. Geoffrey listened in torture. He heard the Vicar asking for explanations. All the united, anxious voices replied in brief phrases.

'It was that other,' cried the Fräulein. 'He knocked him over - Ha!'

She was shrill and vindictive.

'I don't think so,' said the father to the Vicar, in a quite audible but private tone, speaking as if the Fräulein did not understand his English.

The Vicar addressed his children's governess in bad German. She replied in a torrent which he would not confess was too much for him. Maurice was making little moaning, sighing noises.

'Where's your pain, boy, eh?' the father asked pathetically.

'Leave him alone a bit,' came the cool voice of Henry. 'He's winded, if no more.'

'You'd better see that no bones are broken,' said the anxious Vicar.

'It wor a blessing as he should a dropped on that heap of hay just there,' said the labourer. 'If he'd happened to ha' caught hisself on this nog o' wood 'e wouldna ha' stood much chance.'

Geoffrey wondered when he would have courage to venture down. He had wild notions of pitching himself head foremost from the stack: if he could only extinguish himself, he would be safe. Quite frantically, he longed not to be. The idea of going through life thus coiled up within himself in morbid self-consciousness, always lonely, surly, and a misery, was enough to make him cry out. What would they all think when they knew he had knocked Maurice off that high stack?

They were talking to Maurice down below. The lad had recovered in great measure, and was able to answer faintly.

'Whatever was you doin'?' the father asked gently. 'Was

you playing about with our Geoffrey? – Aye, and where is he?’

Geoffrey’s heart stood still.

‘I dunno,’ said Henry, in a curious, ironic tone.

‘Go an’ have a look,’ pleaded the father, infinitely relieved over one son, anxious now concerning the other. Geoffrey could not bear that his eldest brother should climb up and question him in his high-pitched drawl of curiosity. The culprit doggedly set his feet on the ladder. His nailed boots slipped a rung.

‘Mind yourself,’ shouted the over-wrought father.

Geoffrey stood like a criminal at the foot of the ladder, glancing furtively at the group. Maurice was lying, pale and slightly convulsed, upon a heap of hay. The Fräulein was kneeling beside his head. The Vicar had the lad’s shirt full open down the breast, and was feeling for broken ribs. The father kneeled on the other side, the labourer and Henry stood aside.

‘I can’t find anything broken,’ said the Vicar, and he sounded slightly disappointed.

‘There’s nowt broken to find,’ murmured Maurice, smiling.

The father started. ‘Eh?’ he said. ‘Eh?’ and he bent over the invalid.

‘I say it’s not hurt me,’ repeated Maurice.

‘What were you doing?’ asked the cold, ironic voice of Henry. Geoffrey turned his head away: he had not yet raised his face.

‘Nowt as I know on,’ he muttered in a surly tone.

‘Why!’ cried Fräulein in a reproachful tone. ‘I see him – knock him over!’ She made a fierce gesture with her elbow. Henry curled his long moustache sardonically.

‘Nay lass, niver,’ smiled the wan Maurice. ‘He was far enough away from me when I slipped.’

‘Oh, ah!’ cried the Fräulein, not understanding.

‘Yi,’ smiled Maurice indulgently.

‘I think you’re mistaken,’ said the father, rather tactlessly, smiling at the girl as if she were ‘wanting’.

‘Oh no,’ she cried. ‘I see him.’

'Nay, lass,' smiled Maurice quietly.

She was a Pole, named Paula Jablonowsky: young, only twenty years old, swift and light as a wild cat, with a strange, wild-cat way of grinning. Her hair was blonde and full of life, all crisped into many tendrils with vitality, shaking round her face. Her fine blue eyes were peculiarly lidded, and she seemed to look piercingly, then languorously, like a wild cat. She had somewhat Slavonic cheek-bones, and was very much freckled. It was evident that the Vicar, a pale, rather cold man, hated her.

Maurice lay pale and smiling in her lap, whilst she cleaved to him like a mate. One felt instinctively that they were mated. She was ready at any minute to fight with ferocity in his defence, now he was hurt. Her looks at Geoffrey were full of fierceness. She bowed over Maurice and caressed him with her foreign-sounding English.

'You say what you lai-ike,' she laughed, giving him lordship over her.

'Hadn't you better be going and looking what has become of Margery?' asked the Vicar in tones of reprimand.

'She is with her mother - I heard her. I will go in a whai-ile,' smiled the girl coolly.

'Do you feel as if you could stand?' asked the father, still anxiously.

'Aye, in a bit,' smiled Maurice.

'You want to get up?' caressed the girl, bowing over him, till her face was not far from his.

'I'm in no hurry,' he replied, smiling brilliantly.

This accident had given him quite a strange new ease, an authority. He felt extraordinarily glad. New power had come to him all at once.

'You in no hurry,' she repeated, gathering his meaning. She smiled tenderly: she was in his service.

'She leaves us in another month - Mrs Inwood could stand no more of her,' apologized the Vicar quietly to the father.

'Why, is she -'

'Like a wild thing - disobedient and insolent.'

'Ha!'

The father sounded abstract.

'No more foreign governesses for me.'

Maurice stirred, and looked up at the girl.

'You stand up?' she asked brightly. 'You well?'

He laughed again, showing his teeth winsomely. She lifted his head, sprang to her feet, her hands still holding his head, then she took him under the armpits and had him on his feet before anyone could help. He was much taller than she. He grasped her strong shoulders heavily, leaned against her, and, feeling her round, firm breast doubled up against his side, he smiled, catching his breath.

'You see, I'm all right,' he gasped. 'I was only winded.'

'You all raight?' she cried, in great glee.

'Yes, I am.'

He walked a few steps after a moment.

'There's nowt ails me, father,' he laughed.

'Quite well, you?' she cried in a pleading tone. He laughed outright, looked down at her, touching her cheek with his fingers.

'That's it - if tha likes.'

'If I lai-ike!' she repeated, radiant.

'She's going at the end of three weeks,' said the Vicar consolingly to the farmer.

2

While they were talking, they heard the far-off hooting of a pit.

'There goes th' loose 'a,' said Henry coldly. 'We're *not* going to get that corner up today.'

The father looked round anxiously.

'Now, Maurice, are you sure you're all right?' he asked.

'Yes, I'm all right. Haven't I told you?'

'Then you sit down there, and in a bit you can be getting dinner out. Henry, you go on the stack. Wheer's Jim? Oh, he's minding the hosses. Bill, and you, Geoffrey, you can pick while Jim loads.'

Maurice sat down under the wych elm to recover. The

Fräulein had fled back. He made up his mind to ask her to marry him. He had got fifty pounds of his own, and his mother would help him. For a long time he sat musing, thinking what he would do. Then, from the float he fetched a big basket covered with a cloth, and spread the dinner. There was an immense rabbit-pie, a dish of cold potatoes, much bread, a great piece of cheese, and a solid rice pudding.

These two fields were four miles from the home farm. But they had been in the hands of the Wookeys for several generations, therefore the father kept them on, and everyone looked forward to the hay harvest at Greasley: it was a kind of picnic. They brought dinner and tea in the milk-float, which the father drove over in the morning. The lads and the labourers cycled. Off and on, the harvest lasted a fortnight. As the high road from Alfreton to Nottingham ran at the foot of the fields, someone usually slept in the hay under the shed to guard the tools. The sons took it in turns. They did not care for it much, and were for that reason anxious to finish the harvest on this day. But work went slack and disjointed after Maurice's accident.

When the load was teemed, they gathered round the white cloth, which was spread under a tree between the hedge and the stack, and, sitting on the ground, ate their meal. Mrs Wookey sent always a clean cloth, and knives and forks and plates for everybody. Mr Wookey was always rather proud of this spread: everything was so proper.

'There now,' he said, sitting down jovially. 'Doesn't this look nice now - eh?'

They all sat round the white spread, in the shadow of the tree and the stack, and looked out up the fields as they ate. From their shady coolness, the gold sward seemed liquid, molten with heat. The horse with the empty wagon wandered a few yards, then stood feeding. Everything was still as a trance. Now and again, the horse between the shafts of the load that stood propped beside the stack, jingled his loose bit as he ate. The men ate and drank in silence, the father reading the newspaper, Maurice leaning back on a saddle, Henry reading the *Nation*, the others eating busily.

Presently 'Helloa! 'Er's 'ere again!' exclaimed Bill. All looked up. Paula was coming across the field carrying a plate.

'She's bringing something to tempt your appetite, Maurice,' said the eldest brother ironically. Maurice was midway through a large wedge of rabbit-pie and some cold potatoes.

'Aye, bless me if she's not,' laughed the father. 'Put that away, Maurice, it's a shame to disappoint her.'

Maurice looked round very shamefaced, not knowing what to do with his plate.

'Give it over here,' said Bill. 'I'll polish him off.'

'Bringing something for the invalid?' laughed the father to the Fräulein. 'He's looking up nicely.'

'I bring him some chicken, him!' She nodded her head at Maurice childishly. He flushed and smiled.

'Tha doesna mean ter bust 'im,' said Bill.

Everybody laughed aloud. The girl did not understand, so she laughed also. Maurice ate his portion very sheepishly.

The father pitied his son's shyness.

'Come here and sit by me,' he said. 'Eh, Fräulein! Is that what they call you?'

'I sit by you, father,' she said innocently.

Henry threw his head back and laughed long and noiselessly.

She settled near to the big, handsome man.

'My name,' she said, 'is Paula Jablonsky.'

'Is what?' said the father, and the other men went into roars of laughter.

'Tell me again,' said the father. 'Your name -'

'Paula.'

'Paula? Oh - well, it's a rum sort of name, eh? His name -' he nodded at his son.

'Maurice - I know.' She pronounced it sweetly, then laughed into the father's eyes. Maurice blushed to the roots of his hair.

They questioned her concerning her history, and made out that she came from Hanover, that her father was a shopkeeper, and that she had run away from home because she did not like her father. She had gone to Paris.



'Oh,' said the father, now dubious. 'And what did you do there?'

'In school – in a young ladies' school.'

'Did you like it?'

'Oh no – no laife – no life!'

'What?'

'When we go out – two and two – all together – no more. Ah, no life, no life.'

'Well, that's a winder!' exclaimed the father. 'No life in Paris! And have you found much life in England?'

'No – ah no. I don't like it.' She made a grimace at the Vicarage.

'How long have you been in England?'

'Chreestmas – so.'

'And what will you do?'

'I will go to London, or to Paris. Ah, Paris! – Or get married!' She laughed into the father's eyes.

The father laughed heartily.

'Get married, eh? And who to?'

'I don't know. I am going away.'

'The country's too quiet for you?' asked the father.

'Too quiet – hm!' she nodded in assent.

'You wouldn't care for making butter and cheese?'

'Making butter – hm!' She turned to him with a glad, bright gesture. 'I like it.'

'Oh,' laughed the father. 'You would, would you?'

She nodded vehemently, with glowing eyes.

'She'd like anything in the shape of a change,' said Henry judicially.

'I think she would,' agreed the father. It did not occur to them that she fully understood what they said. She looked at them closely, then thought with bowed head.

'Hullo!' exclaimed Henry, the alert. A tramp was slouching towards them through the gap. He was a very seedy, slinking fellow, with a tang of horsey braggadocio about him. Small, thin, and ferrety, with a week's red beard bristling on his pointed chin, he came slouching forward.

'Have yer got a bit of a job goin'?' he asked.

'A bit of a job,' repeated the father. 'Why, can't you see as we've a'most done?'

'Aye – but I noticed you was a hand short, an' I thowt as 'appen you'd gie me half a day.'

'What, are *you* any good in a hay close?' asked Henry, with a sneer.

The man stood slouching against the haystack. All the others were seated on the floor. He had an advantage.

'I could work aside any on yer,' he bragged.

'Tha looks it,' laughed Bill.

'And what's your regular trade?' asked the father.

'I'm a jockey by rights. But I did a bit o' dirty work for a boss o' mine, an' I was landed. 'E got the benefit, I got kicked out. 'E axed me – an' then 'e looked as if 'e'd never seed me.'

'Did he, though!' exclaimed the father sympathetically.

'E did that!' asserted the man.

'But we've got nothing for you,' said Henry coldly.

'What does the boss say?' asked the man, impudent.

'No, we've no work you can do,' said the father. 'You can have a bit o' something to eat, if you like.'

'I should be glad of it,' said the man.

He was given the chunk of rabbit-pie that remained. This he ate greedily. There was something debased, parasitic, about him, which disgusted Henry. The others regarded him as a curiosity.

'That was nice and tasty,' said the tramp, with gusto.

'Do you want a piece of bread 'n' cheese?' asked the father.

'It'll help to fill up,' was the reply.

The man ate this more slowly. The company was embarrassed by his presence, and could not talk. All the men lit their pipes, the meal over.

'So you dunna want any help?' said the tramp at last.

'No – we can manage what bit there is to do.'

'You don't happen to have a fill of bacca to spare, do you?'

The father gave him a good pinch.

'You're all right here,' he said, looking round. They resented this familiarity. However, he filled his clay pipe and smoked with the rest.

As they were sitting silent, another figure came through the gap in the hedge, and noiselessly approached. It was a woman. She was rather small and finely made. Her face was small, very ruddy, and comely, save for the look of bitterness and aloofness that it wore. Her hair was drawn tightly back under a sailor hat. She gave an impression of cleanliness, of precision and directness.

'Have you got some work?' she asked of her man. She ignored the rest. He tucked his tail between his legs.

'No, they haven't got no work for me. They've just gave me a draw of bacca.'

He was a mean crawl of a man.

'An' am I goin' to wait for you out there on the lane all day?'

'You needn't if you don't like. You could go on.'

'Well, are you coming?' she asked contemptuously. He rose to his feet in a rickety fashion.

'You needn't be in such a mighty hurry,' he said. 'If you'd wait a bit you might get summat.'

She glanced for the first time over the men. She was quite young, and would have been pretty, were she not so hard and callous-looking.

'Have you had your dinner?' asked the father.

She looked at him with a kind of anger and turned away. Her face was so childish in its contours, contrasting strangely with her expression.

'Are you coming?' she said to the man.

'He's had his tuck-in. Have a bit, if you want it,' coaxed the father.

'What have you had?' she flashed to the man.

'He's had all what was left o' th' rabbit-pie,' said Geoffrey, in an indignant, mocking tone, 'and a great hunk o' bread an' cheese.'

'Well, it was gave me,' said the man.

The young woman looked at Geoffrey, and he at her. There

was a sort of kinship between them. Both were at odds with the world. Geoffrey smiled satirically. She was too grave, too deeply incensed even to smile.

'There's a cake here, though - you can have a bit o' that,' said Maurice blithely.

She eyed him with scorn.

Again she looked at Geoffrey. He seemed to understand her. She turned, and in silence departed. The man remained obstinately sucking at his pipe. Everybody looked at him with hostility.

'We'll be getting to work,' said Henry, rising, pulling off his coat. Paula got to her feet. She was a little bit confused by the presence of the tramp.

'I go,' she said, smiling brilliantly. Maurice rose and followed her sheepishly.

'A good grind, eh?' said the tramp, nodding after the *Fräulein*. The men only half understood him, but they hated him.

'Hadh't you better be getting off?' said Henry.

The man rose obediently. He was all slouching, parasitic insolence. Geoffrey loathed him, longed to exterminate him. He was exactly the worst foe of the hypersensitive: insolence without sensibility, preying on sensibility.

'Aren't you goin' to give me summat for her? It's nowt she's had all day, to my knowin'. She'll 'appen eat it if I take it 'er - though she gets more than I've any knowledge of' - this with a lewd wink of jealous spite. 'And then tries to keep a tight hand on me,' he sneered, taking the bread and cheese, and stuffing it in his pocket.

3

Geoffrey worked sullenly all the afternoon, and Maurice did the horse-raking. It was exceedingly hot. So the day wore on, the atmosphere thickened, and the sunlight grew blurred. Geoffrey was picking with Bill - helping to load the wagons from the winrows. He was sulky, though extraordinarily relieved: Maurice would not tell. Since the quarrel

neither brother had spoken to the other. But their silence was entirely amicable, almost affectionate. They had both been deeply moved, so much so that their ordinary intercourse was interrupted: but underneath, each felt a strong regard for the other. Maurice was peculiarly happy, his feeling of affection swimming over everything. But Geoffrey was still sullenly hostile to the most part of the world. He felt isolated. The free and easy inter-communication between the other workers left him distinctly alone. And he was a man who could not bear to stand alone, he was too much afraid of the vast confusion of life surrounding him, in which he was helpless. Geoffrey mistrusted himself with everybody.

The work went on slowly. It was unbearably hot, and everyone was disheartened.

'We s'll have getting-on-for another day of it,' said the father at tea-time, as they sat under the tree.

'Quite a day,' said Henry.

'Somebody'll have to stop, then,' said Geoffrey. 'It 'ud better be me.'

'Nay, lad, I'll stop,' said Maurice, and he hid his head in confusion.

'Stop again tonight!' exclaimed the father. 'I'd rather you went home.'

'Nay, I'm stoppin',' protested Maurice.

'He wants to do his courting,' Henry enlightened them.

The father thought seriously about it.

'I don't know . . .' he mused, rather perturbed.

But Maurice stayed. Towards eight o'clock, after sun-down, the men mounted their bicycles, the father put the horse in the float, and all departed. Maurice stood in the gap of the hedge and watched them go, the cart rolling and swinging down-hill, over the grass stubble, the cyclists dipping swiftly like shadows in front. All passed through the gate, there was a quick clatter of hoofs on the roadway under the lime trees, and they were gone. The young man was very much excited, almost afraid, at finding himself alone.

Darkness was rising from the valley. Already, up the steep

hill the cart-lamps crept indecisively, and the cottage windows were lit. Everything looked strange to Maurice, as if he had not seen it before. Down the hedge a large lime tree teemed with scent that seemed almost like a voice speaking. It startled him. He caught a breath of the over-sweet fragrance, then stood still, listening expectantly.

Up-hill, a horse whinneyed. It was the young mare. The heavy horses went thundering across to the far hedge.

Maurice wondered what to do. He wandered round the deserted stacks restlessly. Heat came in wafts, in thick strands. The evening was a long time cooling. He thought he would go and wash himself. There was a trough of pure water in the hedge bottom. It was filled by a tiny spring that filtered over the brim of the trough down the lush hedge bottom of the lower field. All round the trough, in the upper field, the land was marshy, and there the meadow-sweet stood like clots of mist, very sickly-smelling in the twilight. The night did not darken, for the moon was in the sky, so that as the tawny colour drew off the heavens they remained pallid with a dimmed moon. The purple bell-flowers in the hedge went black, the ragged robin turned its pink to a faded white, the meadow-sweet gathered light as if it were phosphorescent, and it made the air ache with scent.

Maurice knelt on the slab of stone bathing his hands and arms, then his face. The water was deliciously cool. He had still an hour before Paula would come: she was not due till nine. So he decided to take his bath at night instead of waiting till morning. Was he not sticky, and was not Paula coming to talk to him? He was delighted the thought had occurred to him. As he soused his head in the trough, he wondered what the little creatures that lived in the velvety silt at the bottom would think of the taste of soap. Laughing to himself, he squeezed his cloth into the water. He washed himself from head to foot, standing in the fresh, forsaken corner of the field, where no one could see him by daylight, so that now, in the veiled grey tinge of moonlight, he was no more noticeable than the crowded flowers. The night had on a new look: he never remembered to have seen the lustrous grey sheen of it

before, nor to have noticed how vital the lights looked, like live folk inhabiting the silvery spaces. And the tall trees, wrapped obscurely in their mantles, would not have surprised him had they begun to move in converse. As he dried himself, he discovered little wanderings in the air, felt on his sides soft touches and caresses that were peculiarly delicious: sometimes they startled him, and he laughed as if he were not alone. The flowers, the meadow-sweet particularly, haunted him. He reached to put his hand over their fleeciness. They touched his thighs. Laughing, he gathered them and dusted himself all over with their cream dust and fragrance. For a moment he hesitated in wonder at himself: but the subtle glow in the hoary and black night reassured him. Things never had looked so personal and full of beauty, he had never known the wonder in himself before.

At nine o'clock he was waiting under the elder bush, in a state of high trepidation, but feeling that he was worthy, having a sense of his own wonder. She was late. At a quarter-past nine she came, flitting swiftly, in her own eager way.

'No, she would *not* go to sleep,' said Paula, with a world of wrath in her tone. He laughed bashfully. They wandered out into the dim, hill-side field.

'I have sat – in that bedroom – for an hour, for hours,' she cried indignantly. She took a deep breath: 'Ah, breathe!' she smiled.

She was very intense, and full of energy.

'I want' – she was clumsy with the language – 'I want – I should laike – to run – therel' She pointed across the field.

'Let's run, then,' he said curiously.

'Yes!'

And in an instant she was gone. He raced after her. For all he was so young and limber, he had difficulty in catching her. At first he could scarcely see her, though he could hear the rustle of her dress. She sped with astonishing fleetness. He overtook her, caught her by the arm, and they stood panting, facing one another with laughter.

'I could win,' she asserted blithely.

'Tha couldna,' he replied, with a peculiar, excited laugh.

They walked on, rather breathless. In front of them suddenly appeared the dark shapes of the three feeding horses.

'We ride a horse?' she said.

'What, bareback?' he asked.

'You say?' She did not understand.

'With no saddle?'

'No saddle — yes — no saddle.'

'Coop, lass!' he said to the mare, and in a minute he had her by the forelock, and was leading her down to the stacks, where he put a halter on her. She was a big, strong mare. Maurice seated the Fräulein, clambered himself in front of the girl, using the wheel of the wagon as a mount, and together they trotted uphill, she holding lightly round his waist. From the crest of the hill they looked round.

The sky was darkening with an awning of cloud. On the left the hill rose black and wooded, made cosy by a few lights from cottages along the highway. The hill spread to the right, and tufts of trees shut round. But in front was a great vista of night, a sprinkle of cottage candles, a twinkling cluster of lights, like an elfish fair in full swing, at the colliery an encampment of light at a village, a red flare on the sky far off, above an iron-foundry, and in the farthest distance the dim breathing of town lights. As they watched the night stretch far out, her arms tightened round his waist, and he pressed his elbows to his side, pressing her arms closer still. The horse moved restlessly. They clung to each other.

'Tha daesna want to go right away?' he asked the girl behind him.

'I stay with you,' she answered softly, and he felt her crouching close against him. He laughed curiously. He was afraid to kiss her, though he was urged to do so. They remained still, on the restless horse, watching the small lights lead deep into the night, in infinite distance.

'I don't want to go,' he said, in a tone half pleading.

She did not answer. The horse stirred restlessly.

'Let him run,' cried Paula, 'fast!'

She broke the spell, startled him into a little fury. He kicked the mare, hit her, and away she plunged down-hill. The girl



clung tightly to the young man. They were riding bareback down a rough, steep hill. Maurice clung hard with hands and knees. Paula held him fast round the waist, leaning her head on his shoulders, and thrilling with excitement.

'We shall be off, we shall be off,' he cried, laughing with excitement; but she only crouched behind and pressed tight to him. The mare tore across the field. Maurice expected every moment to be flung on to the grass. He gripped with all the strength of his knees. Paula tucked herself behind him, and often wrenched him almost from his hold. Man and girl were taut with effort.

At last the mare came to a standstill, blowing. Paula slid off, and in an instant Maurice was beside her. They were both highly excited. Before he knew what he was doing, he had her in his arms, fast, and was kissing her, and laughing. They did not move for some time. Then, in silence, they walked towards the stacks.

It had grown quite dark, the night was thick with cloud. He walked with his arm round Paula's waist, she with her arm round him. They were near the stacks when Maurice felt a spot of rain.

'It's going to rain,' he said.

'Rain!' she echoed, as if it were trivial.

'I s'll have to put the stack-cloth on,' he said gravely. She did not understand.

When they got to the stacks, he went round to the shed, to return staggering in the darkness under the burden of the immense and heavy cloth. It had not been used once during the hay harvest.

'What are you going to do?' asked Paula, coming close to him in the darkness.

'Cover the top of the stack with it,' he replied. 'Put it over the stack, to keep the rain out.'

'Ah!' she cried, 'up there!' He dropped his burden. 'Yes,' he answered.

Fumbling he reared the long ladder up the side of the stack. He could not see the top.

'I hope it's solid,' he said softly.

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

A few smart drops of rain sounded drumming on the cloth. They seemed like another presence. It was very dark indeed between the great buildings of hay. She looked up the black wall and shrank to him.

'You carry it up there?' she asked.

'Yes,' he answered.

'I help you?' she said.

And she did. They opened the cloth. He clambered first up the steep ladder, bearing the upper part, she followed closely, carrying her full share. They mounted the shaky ladder in silence, stealthily.

### 4

As they climbed the stacks a light stopped at the gate on the high road. It was Geoffrey, come to help his brother with the cloth. Afraid of his own intrusion, he wheeled his bicycle silently towards the shed. This was a corrugated iron erection, on the opposite side of the hedge from the stacks. Geoffrey let his light go in front of him, but there was no sign from the lovers. He thought he saw a shadow slinking away. The light of the bicycle lamp sheered yellowly across the dark, catching a glint of raindrops, a mist of darkness, shadow of leaves, and strokes of long grass. Geoffrey entered the shed – no one was there. He walked slowly and doggedly round to the stacks. He had passed the wagon, when he heard something sheering down upon him. Starting back under the wall of hay, he saw the long ladder slither across the side of the stack, and fall with a bruising ring.

'What wor that?' he heard Maurice, aloft, ask cautiously.

'Something fall,' came the curious, almost pleased voice of the Fräulein.

'It wor niver th' ladder,' said Maurice. He peered over the side of the stack. He lay down, looking.

'It is an' a'l' he exclaimed. 'We knocked it down with the cloth, dragging it over.'

'We fast up here?' she exclaimed with a thrill.

'We are that – without I shout and make 'em hear at the Vicarage.'

'Oh no,' she said quickly.

'I don't want to,' he replied, with a short laugh. There came a swift clatter of raindrops on the cloth. Geoffrey crouched under the wall of the other stack.

'Mind where you tread – here, let me straighten this end,' said Maurice, with a peculiar intimate tone – a command and an embrace. 'We s'll have to sit under it. At any rate, we shan't get wet.'

'Not get wet!' echoed the girl, pleased, but agitated.

Geoffrey heard the slide and rustle of the cloth over the top of the stack, heard Maurice telling her to 'Mind!'

'Mind!' she repeated. 'Mind! you say "Mind!"'

'Well, what if I do?' he laughed. 'I don't want you to fall over th' side, do I?' His tone was masterful, but he was not quite sure of himself.

There was silence a moment or two.

'Maurice!' she said plaintively.

'I'm here,' he answered tenderly, his voice shaky with excitement that was near to distress. 'There, I've done. Now should we – we'll sit under this corner.'

'Maurice!' she was rather pitiful.

'What? You'll be all right,' he remonstrated, tenderly indignant.

'I be all raight,' she repeated, 'I be all raight, Maurice?'

'Tha knows tha will – I canna ca' thee Powla. Should I ca' thee, Minnie?'

It was the name of a dead sister.

'Minnie?' she exclaimed in surprise.

'Aye, should I?'

She answered in full-throated German. He laughed shakily.

'Come on – come on under. But do yer wish you was safe in th' Vicarage? Should I shout for somebody?' he asked.

'I don't wish, no!' She was vehement.

'Art sure?' he insisted, almost indignantly.

'Sure – I quite sure.' She laughed.

Geoffrey turned away at the last words. Then the rain beat heavily. The lonely brother slouched miserably to the hut, where the rain played a mad tattoo. He felt very miserable, and jealous of Maurice.

His bicycle lamp, downcast, shone a yellow light on the stark floor of the shed or hut with one wall open. It lit up the trodden earth, the shafts of tools lying piled under the beam, beside the dreary grey metal of the building. He took off the lamp, shone it round the hut. There were piles of harness, tools, a big sugar-box, a deep bed of hay – then the beams across the corrugated iron, all very dreary and stark. He shone the lamp into the night: nothing but the furtive glitter of rain-drops through the mist of darkness, and black shapes hovering round.

Geoffrey blew out the light and flung himself on to the hay. He would put the ladder up for them in a while, when they would be wanting it. Meanwhile he sat and gloated over Maurice's felicity. He was imaginative, and now he had something concrete to work upon. Nothing in the whole of life stirred him so profoundly, and so utterly, as the thought of this woman. For Paula was strange, foreign, different from the ordinary girls: the rousing, feminine quality seemed in her concentrated, brighter, more fascinating than in anyone he had known, so that he felt most like a moth near a candle. He would have loved her wildly – but Maurice had got her. His thoughts beat the same course, round and round. What was it like when you kissed her, when she held you tight round the waist, how did she feel towards Maurice, did she love to touch him, was he fine and attractive to her; what did she think of himself – she merely disregarded him, as she would disregard a horse in a field; why would she do so, why couldn't he make her regard himself, instead of Maurice: he would never command a woman's regard like that, he always gave in to her too soon; if only some woman would come and take him for what he was worth, though he was such a stumbler and showed to such disadvantage, ah, what a grand thing it would be; how he would kiss her. Then round he went again in the same course, brooding almost like a madman. Meanwhile the rain drummed

deep on the shed, then grew lighter and softer. There came the drip, drip of the drops falling outside.

Geoffrey's heart leaped up his chest, and he clenched himself, as a black shape crept round the post of the shed and, bowing, entered silently. The young man's heart beat so heavily in plunges, he could not get his breath to speak. It was shock, rather than fear. The form felt towards him. He sprang up, gripped it with his great hand's panting 'Now, then!'

There was no resistance, only a little whimper of despair.

'Let me go,' said a woman's voice.

'What are you after?' he asked, in deep, gruff tones.

'I thought 'e was 'ere,' she wept despairingly, with little, stubborn sobs.

'An' you've found what you didn't expect, have you?'

At the sound of his bullying she tried to get away from him.

'Let me go,' she said.

'Who did you expect to find here?' he asked, but more his natural self.

'I expected my husband - him as you saw at dinner. Let me go.'

'Why, is it you?' exclaimed Geoffrey. 'Has he left you?'

'Let me go,' said the woman sullenly, trying to draw away. He realized that the sleeve was very wet, her arm slender under his grasp. Suddenly he grew ashamed of himself: he had no doubt hurt her, gripping her so hard. He relaxed, but did not let her go.

'An' are you searching round after that snipe as was here at dinner?' he asked. She did not answer.

'Where did he leave you?'

'I left him - here. I've seen nothing of him since.'

'I s'd think it's good riddance,' he said. She did not answer. He gave a short laugh, saying:

'I should ha' thought you wouldn't ha' wanted to clap eyes on him again.'

'He's my husband - an' he's not go n' to run off if I can stop him.'

Geoffrey was silent, not knowing what to say.

'Have you got a jacket on?' he asked at last.

'What do you think? You've got hold of it.'

'You're wet through, aren't you?'

'I shouldn't be dry, comin' through that teemin' rain. But 'e's not here, so I'll go.'

'I mean,' he said humbly, 'are you wet through?'

She did not answer. He felt her shiver.

'Are you cold?' he asked, in surprise and concern.

She did not answer. He did not know what to say.

'Stop a minute,' he said, and he fumbled in his pocket for his matches. He struck a light, holding it in the hollow of his large, hard palm. He was a big man, and he looked anxious. Shedding the light on her, he saw she was rather pale, and very weary looking. Her old sailor hat was sodden and drooping with rain. She wore a fawn-coloured jacket of smooth cloth. This jacket was black-wet where the rain had beaten, her skirt hung sodden, and dripped on to her boots. The match went out.

'Why, you're wet through!' he said.

She did not answer.

'Shall you stop in here while it gives over?' he asked. She did not answer.

'Cause if you will, you'd better take your things off, an' have th' rug. There's a horse-rug in the box.'

He waited, but she would not answer. So he lit his bicycle lamp, and rummaged in the box, pulling out a large brown blanket, striped with scarlet and yellow. She stood stock still. He shone the light on her. She was very pale, and trembling fitfully.

'Are you that cold?' he asked in concern. 'Take your jacket off, and your hat, and put this right over you.'

Mechanically, she undid the enormous fawn-coloured buttons, and unpinned her hat. With her black hair drawn back from her low, honest brow, she looked little more than a girl, like a girl driven hard with womanhood by stress of life. She was small, and natty, with neat little features. But she shivered convulsively.

'Is something a-matter with you?' he asked.

'I've walked to Bulwell and back,' she quivered, 'looking

for him – an' I've not touched a thing since this morning.' She did not weep – she was too dreary-hardened to cry. He looked at her in dismay, his mouth half open: 'Gormin' as Maurice would have said.

'Aven't you had nothing to eat?' he said.

Then he turned aside to the box. There, the bread remaining was kept, and the great piece of cheese, and such things as sugar and salt, with all table utensils: there was some butter.

She sat down drearily on the bed of hay. He cut her a piece of bread and butter, and a piece of cheese. This she took, but ate listlessly.

'I want a drink,' she said.

'We 'aven't got no beer,' he answered. 'My father doesn't have it.'

'I want water,' she said.

He took a can and plunged through the wet darkness, under the great black hedge, down to the trough. As he came back he saw her in the half-lit little cave sitting bunched together. The soaked grass wet his feet – he thought of her. When he gave her a cup of water, her hand touched his and he felt her fingers hot and glossy. She trembled so she spilled the water.

'Do you feel badly?' he asked.

'I can't keep myself still – but it's only with being tired and having nothing to eat.'

He scratched his head contemplatively, waited while she ate her piece of bread and butter. Then he offered her another piece.

'I don't want it just now,' she said.

'You'll have to eat summat,' he said.

'I couldn't eat any more just now.'

He put the piece down undecidedly on the box. Then there was another long pause. He stood up with bent head. The bicycle, like a restful animal, glittered behind him, turning towards the wall. The woman sat hunched on the hay, shivering.

'Can't you get warm?' he asked.

'I shall by an' by – don't you bother. I'm taking your seat – are you stopping here all night?'

'Yes.'

'I'll be goin' in a bit,' she said.

'Nay, I non want you to go. I'm thinkin' how you could get warm.'

'Don't you bother about me,' she remonstrated, almost irritably.

'I just want to see as the stacks is all right. You take your shoes an' stockin's an' all your wet things off: you can easy wrap yourself all over in that rug, there's not so much of you.'

'It's raining - I s'll be all right - I s'll be going in a minute.'

'I've got to see as the stacks is safe. Take your wet things off.'

'Are you coming back?' she asked.

'I mightn't, not till morning.'

'Well, I s'll be gone in ten minutes, then. I've no rights to be here, an I s'll not let anybody be turned out for me.'

'You won't be turning me out.'

'Whether or no, I shan't stop.'

'Well, shall you if I come back?' he asked. She did not answer.

He went. In a few moments, she blew the light out. The rain was falling steadily, and the night was a black gulf. All was intensely still. Geoffrey listened everywhere: no sound save the rain. He stood between the stacks, but only heard the trickle of water, and the light swish of rain. Everything was lost in blackness. He imagined death was like that, many things dissolved in silence and darkness, blotted out, but existing. In the dense blackness he felt himself almost extinguished. He was afraid he might not find things the same. Almost frantically, he stumbled, feeling his way, till his hand touched the wet metal. He had been looking for a gleam of light.

'Did you blow the lamp out?' he asked, fearful lest the silence should answer him.

'Yes,' she answered humbly. He was glad to hear her voice. Groping into the pitch-dark shed, he knocked against the box, part of whose cover served as table. There was a clatter and a fall.



## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

'That's the lamp, an' the knife, an' the cup,' he said. He struck a match.

'Th' cup's not broke.' He put it into the box.

'But th' oil's spilled out o' th' lamp. It always was a rotten old thing.' He hastily blew out his match, which was burning his fingers. Then he struck another light.

'You don't want a lamp, you know you don't, and I s'll be going directly, so you come an' lie down an' get your night's rest. I'm not taking any of your place.'

He looked at her by the light of another match. She was a queer little bundle, all brown, with gaudy border folding in and out, and her little face peering at him. As the match went out she saw him beginning to smile.

'I can sit right at this end,' she said. 'You lie down.'

He came and sat on the hay, at some distance from her. After a spell of silence:

'Is he really your husband?' he asked.

'He is!' she answered grimly.

'Hm!' Then there was silence again.

After a while: 'Are you warm now?'

'Why do you bother yourself?'

'I don't bother myself – do you follow him because you like him?' He put it very timidly. He wanted to know.

'I don't – I wish he was dead,' this with bitter contempt. Then doggedly: 'But he's my husband.'

He gave a short laugh.

'By Gad!' he said.

Again, after a while: 'Have you been married long?'

'Four years.'

'Four years – why, how old are you?'

'Twenty-three.'

'Are you turned twenty-three?'

'Last May.'

'Then you're four month older than me.' He mused over it. They were only two voices in the pitch-black night. It was eerie silence again.

'And do you just tramp about?' he asked.

'He reckons he's looking for a job. But he doesn't like work

in any shape or form. He was a stableman when I married him, at Greenhalgh's, the horse-dealers, at Chesterfield, where I was housemaid. He left that job when the baby was only two months, and I've been badgered about from pillar to post ever sin'. They say a rolling stone gathers no moss ...'

'An' where's the baby?'

'It died when it was ten months old.'

Now the silence was clinched between them. It was quite a long time before Geoffrey ventured to say sympathetically: 'You haven't much to look forward to.'

'I've wished many a score time when I've started shiverin' an' shakin' at nights, as I was taken bad for death. But we're not that handy at dying.'

He was silent. 'But whatever shall you do?' he faltered.

'I s'll find him, if I drop by th' road.'

'Why?', he asked, wondering, looking her way, though he saw nothing but solid darkness.

'Because I shall. He's not going to have it all his own road.'

'But why don't you leave him?'

'Because he's *not goin' to have it all his own road.*'

She sounded very determined, even vindictive. He sat in wonder, feeling uneasy, and vaguely miserable on her behalf. She sat extraordinarily still. She seemed like a voice only, a presence.

'Are you warm now?' he asked, half afraid.

'A bit warmer – but my feet!' She sounded pitiful.

'Let me warm them with my hands,' he asked her. 'I'm hot enough.'

'No, thank you,' she said coldly.

Then, in the darkness, she felt she had wounded him. He was writhing under her rebuff, for his offer had been pure kindness.

'They're 'appen dirty,' she said, half mocking.

'Well – mine is – an' I have a bath a'most every day,' he answered.

'I don't know when they'll get warm,' she moaned to herself.

'Well, then, put them in my hands.'

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

She heard him faintly rattling the match-box, and then a phosphorescent glare began to fume in his direction. Presently he was holding two smoking, blue-green blotches of light towards her feet. She was afraid. But her feet ached so, and the impulse drove her on, so she placed her soles lightly on the two blotches of smoke. His large hands clasped over her instep, warm and hard.

'They're like ice!' he said, in deep concern.

He warmed her feet as best he could, putting them close against him. Now and again convulsive tremors ran over her. She felt his warm breath on the balls of her toes, that were bunched up in his hands. Leaning forward, she touched his hair delicately with her fingers. He thrilled. She fell to gently stroking his hair, with timid, pleading finger-tips.

'Do they feel any better?' he asked, in a low voice, suddenly lifting his face to her. This sent her hand sliding softly over his face, and her finger-tips caught on his mouth. She drew quickly away. He put his hand out to find hers, in his other palm holding both her feet. His wandering hand met her face. He touched it curiously. It was wet. He put his big fingers cautiously on her eyes, into two little pools of tears.

'What's a matter?' he asked in a low, choked voice.

She leaned down to him and gripped him tightly round the neck, pressing him to her bosom in a little frenzy of pain. Her bitter disillusionment with life, her unalleviated shame and degradation during the last four years, had driven her into loneliness, and hardened her till a large part of her nature was caked and sterile. Now she softened again, and her spring might be beautiful. She had been in a fair way to make an ugly old woman.

She clasped the head of Geoffrey to her breast, which heaved and fell, and heaved again. He was bewildered, full of wonder. He allowed the woman to do as she would with him. Her tears fell on his hair, as she wept noiselessly; and he breathed deep as she did. At last she let go her clasp. He put his arms round her.

'Come and let me warm you,' he said, folding up on his knee and lapping her with his heavy arms against himself. She

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

light could scarcely breathe. Everything seemed to quiver with cold and sickliness.

'Have you often slept out?' he asked her.

'Not so very,' she answered.

'You won't go after *him*?' he asked.

'I s'll have to,' she replied, but she nestled in to Geoffrey. He felt a sudden panic.

'You mustn't,' he exclaimed, and she saw he was afraid for himself. She let it be, was silent.

'We couldn't get married?' he asked thoughtfully.

'No.'

He brooded deeply over this. At length:

'Would you go to Canada with me?'

'We'll see what you think in two months' time,' she replied quietly, without bitterness.

'I s'll think the same,' he protested, hurt.

She did not answer, only watched him steadily. She was there for him to do as he liked with; but she would not injure his fortunes; no, not to save his soul.

'Haven't you got no relations?' he asked.

'A married sister at Crick.'

'On a farm?'

'No – married a farm labourer – but she's very comfortable. I'll go there, if you want me to, just till I can get another place in service.'

He considered this.

'Could you get on a farm?' he asked wistfully.

'Greenhalgh's was a farm.'

He saw the future brighten: she would be a help to him. She agreed to go to her sister, and to get a place of service – until spring, he said, when they would sail for Canada. He waited for the assent.

'You will come with me, then?' he asked.

'When the time comes,' she said.

Her want of faith made him bow his head: she had reason for it.

'Shall you walk to Crick, or go from Langley Mill to Ambergate? But it's only ten mile to walk. So we can go together

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

up Hunt's Hill – you'd have to go past our lane-end, then I could easy nip down an' fetch you some money,' he said humbly.

'I've got half a sovereign by me – it's more than I s'll want.'

'Let's see it,' he said.

After a while, fumbling under the blanket, she brought out the piece of money. He felt she was independent of him. Brooding rather bitterly, he told himself she'd forsake him. His anger gave him courage to ask:

'Shall you go in service in your maiden name?'

'No.'

He was bitterly wrathful with her – full of resentment.

'I bet I s'll niver see you again,' he said, with a short, hard laugh. She put her arms round him, pressed him to her bosom, while the tears rose to her eyes. He was reassured, but not satisfied.

'Shall you write to me tonight?'

'Yes, I will.'

'And can I write to you – who shall I write to?'

'Mrs Bredon.'

'"Bredon"! he repeated bitterly.

He was exceedingly uneasy.

The dawn had grown quite wan. He saw the hedges drooping wet down the grey mist. Then he told her about Maurice.

'Oh, you *shouldn't*!' she said. 'You should ha' put the ladder up for them, you *should*.'

'Well – I don't care.'

'Go and do it now – and I'll go.'

'No, don't you. Stop an' see our Maurice; go on, stop an' see him – then I'll be able to tell him.'

She consented in silence. He had her promise she would not go before he returned. She adjusted her dress, found her way to the trough, where she performed her toilet.

Geoffrey wandered round to the upper field. The stacks looked wet in the mist, the hedge was drenched. Mist rose like steam from the grass, and the near hills were veiled almost to a

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

shadow. In the valley, some peaks of black poplar showed fairly definite, jutting up. He shivered with chill.

There was no sound from the stacks, and he could see nothing. After all, he wondered, were they up there? But he reared the ladder to the place whence it had been swept, then went down the hedge to gather dry sticks. He was breaking off thin dead twigs under a holly tree when he heard, on the perfectly still air: 'Well, I'm dashed!'

He listened intently. Maurice was awake.

'Sithee here!' the lad's voice exclaimed. Then, after a while, the foreign sound of the girl:

'What - oh, thair!'

'Aye, th' ladder's there, right enough.'

'You said it had fall down.'

'Well, I heard it drop - an' I couldna feel it nor see it.'

'You said it had fall down - you lie, you liar.'

'Nay, as true as I'm here -'

'You tell me lies - make me stay here - you tell me lies -'

She was passionately indignant.

'As true as I'm standing here -' he began.

'Lies! - lies! - lies!' she cried. 'I don't believe you, never. You *mean*, you *mean*, *mean*, *mean*!'

'A' raight, then!' He was now incensed, in his turn.

'You are bad, mean, mean, mean.'

'Are ter commin' down?' asked Maurice coldly.

'No - I will not come with you - mean, to tell me lies.'

'Are ter commin' down?'

'No, I don't want you.'

'A' raight, then!'

Geoffrey, peering through the holly tree, saw Maurice negotiating the ladder. The top rung was below the brim of the stack, and rested on the cloth, so it was dangerous to approach. The Fräulein watched him from the end of the stack, where the cloth thrown back showed the light, dry hay. He slipped slightly, she screamed. When he had got on to the ladder, he pulled the cloth away, throwing it back, making it easy for her to descend.

'Now are ter commin'?' he asked.

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

'No!' She shook her head violently, in a pet.

Geoffrey felt slightly contemptuous of her. But Maurice waited.

'Are ter commin'?' he called again.

'No,' she flashed, like a wild cat.

'All right, then I'm going.'

He descended. At the bottom, he stood holding the ladder.

'Come on, while I hold it steady,' he said.

There was no reply. For some minutes he stood patiently with his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder. He was pale, rather washed-out in his appearance, and he drew himself together with cold.

'Are ter commin', or aren't ter?' he asked at length. Still there was no reply.

'Then stop up till tha'rt ready,' he muttered, and he went away. Round the other side of the stacks he met Geoffrey.

'What, are thaigh here?' he exclaimed.

'Bin here a' naight,' replied Geoffrey. 'I come to help thee wi' th' cloth, but I found it on, an' th' ladder down, so I thowt tha'd gone.'

'Did ter put th' ladder up?'

'I did a bit sin.'

Maurice brooded over this, Geoffrey struggled with himself to get out his own news. At last he blurted:

'Tha knows that woman as wor here yis'day dinner - 'er come back, an' stopped i' th' shed a' night, out o' th' rain.'

'Oh - ah!' said Maurice, his eye kindling, and a smile crossing his pallor.

'An' I s'll gi'e her some breakfast.'

'Oh - ah!' repeated Maurice.

'It's th' man as is good-for-nowt, not her,' protested Geoffrey. Maurice did not feel in a position to cast stones.

'Tha pleases thyself,' he said, 'what ter does.' He was very quiet, unlike himself. He seemed bothered and anxious, as Geoffrey had not seen him before.

'What's up wi' thee?' asked the elder brother, who in his own heart was glad, and relieved.

'Nowt,' was the reply.

## LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

They went together to the hut. The woman was folding the blanket. She was fresh from washing, and looked very pretty. Her hair, instead of being screwed tightly back, was coiled in a knot low down, partly covering her ears. Before she had deliberately made herself plain-looking: now she was neat and pretty, with a sweet, womanly gravity.

'Hello. I didn't think to find you here,' said Maurice, very awkwardly, smiling. She watched him gravely without reply. 'But it was better in shelter than outside last night,' he added.

'Yes,' she replied.

'Shall you get a few more sticks?' Geoffrey asked him. It was a new thing for Geoffrey to be leader. Maurice obeyed. He wandered forth into the damp, raw morning. He did not go to the stack, as he shrank from meeting Paula.

At the mouth of the hut, Geoffrey was making the fire. The woman got out coffee from the box: Geoffrey set the tin to boil. They were arranging breakfast when Paula appeared. She was hatless. Bits of hay stuck in her hair, and she was white-faced – altogether, she did not show to advantage.

'Ah – you!' she exclaimed, seeing Geoffrey.

'Hello!' he answered. 'You're out early.'

'Where's Maurice?'

'I dunno, he should be back directly.'

Paula was silent.

'When have you come?' she asked.

'I come last night, but I could see nobody about. I got up half an hour sin', an' put th' ladder up ready to take the stack-cloth up.'

Paula understood, and was silent. When Maurice returned with the faggots, she was crouched warming her hands. She looked up at him, but he kept his eyes averted from her. Geoffrey met the eyes of Lydia, and smiled. Maurice put his hands to the fire.

'You cold?' asked Paula tenderly.

'A bit,' he answered, quite friendly, but reserved. And all the while the four sat round the fire, drinking their smoked coffee, eating each a small piece of toasted bacon, Paula watched eagerly for the eyes of Maurice, and he avoided her.



#### LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

He was gentle, but would not give his eyes to her looks. And Geoffrey smiled constantly to Lydia, who watched gravely.

The German girl succeeded in getting safely into the Vicarage, her escapade unknown to anyone save the housemaid. Before a week was out, she was openly engaged to Maurice, and when her month's notice expired, she went to live at the farm.

Geoffrey and Lydia kept faith one with the other.

## *The Thimble*

SHE had not seen her husband for ten months, not since her fortnight's honeymoon with him, and his departure for France. Then, in those excited days of the early war, he was her comrade, her counterpart in a sort of Bacchic revel before death. Now all that was shut off from her mind, as by a great rent in her life.

Since then, since the honeymoon, she had lived and died and come to life again. There had been his departure to the front. She had loved him then.

'If you want to love your husband,' she had said to her friends, with splendid recklessness, 'you should see him in khaki.' And she had really loved him, he was so handsome in uniform, well-built, yet with a sort of reserve and remoteness that suited the neutral khaki perfectly.

Before, as a barrister with nothing to do, he had been slack and unconvincing, a sort of hanger-on, and she had never come to the point of marrying him. For one thing they neither of them had enough money.

Then came the great shock of the war, his coming to her in a new light, as lieutenant in the artillery. And she had been carried away by his perfect calm manliness and significance, now he was a soldier. He seemed to have gained a fascinating importance that made her seem quite unimportant. It was she who was insignificant and subservient, he who was dignified, with a sort of indifferent lordliness.

So she had married him, all considerations flung to the wind, and had known the bewildering experience of their fortnight's honeymoon, before he left her for the front.

And she had never got over the bewilderment. She had, since then, never thought at all, she seemed to have rushed

## THE THIMBLE

on in a storm of activity and sensation. There was a home to make, and no money to make it with: none to speak of. So, with the swift, business-like aptitude of a startled woman, she had found a small flat in Mayfair, had attended sales and bought suitable furniture, had made the place complete and perfect. She was satisfied. It was small and insignificant, but it was a complete unity.

Then she had had a certain amount of war-work to do, and she had kept up all her social activities. She had not had a moment which was not urgently occupied.

All the while came his letters from France, and she was writing her replies. They both sent a good deal of news to each other, they both expressed their mutual passion.

Then suddenly, amid all this activity, she fell ill with pneumonia and everything lapsed into delirium. And whilst she was ill, he was wounded, his jaw smashed and his face cut up by the bursting of a shell. So they were both laid by.

Now, they were both better, and she was waiting to see him. Since she had been ill, while she had lain or sat in her room in the castle in Scotland, she had thought, thought very much. For she was a woman who was always trying to grasp the whole of her context, always trying to make a complete thing of her own life.

Her illness lay between her and her previous life like a dark night, like a great separation. She looked back, she remembered all she had done, and she was bewildered, she had no key to the puzzle. Suddenly she realized that she knew nothing of this man she had married, he knew nothing of her. What she had of him, vividly, was the visual image. She could *see* him, the whole of him, in her mind's eye. She could remember him with peculiar distinctness, as if the whole of his body were lit up by an intense light, and the image fixed on her mind.

But he was an impression, only a vivid impression.

What her own impression was, she knew most vividly. But what *he* was *himself*; the very thought startled her; it was like looking into a perilous darkness. All that she knew of him was her own affair, purely personal to her, a subjective impression. But there must be a *man*, another being, somewhere in the darkness which she had never broached.

The thought frightened her exceedingly; and her soul, weak from illness, seemed to weep. Here was a new peril, a new terror. And she seemed to have no hope.

She could scarcely bear to think of him as she knew him. She could scarcely bear to conjure up that vivid image of him which remained from the days of her honeymoon. It was something false; it was something which had only to do with herself. The man himself was something quite other, something in the dark, something she dreaded, whose coming she dreaded, as if it were a mitigation of her own being, something set over against her, something that would annul her own image of herself.

Nervously she twisted her long white fingers. She was a beautiful woman, tall and loose and rather thin, with swinging limbs, one for whom the modern fashions were perfect. Her skin was pure and clear, like a Christmas rose, her hair was fair and heavy. She had large, slow, unswerving eyes, that sometimes looked blue and open with a childish candour, sometimes greenish and intent with thought, sometimes hard, sea-like, cruel, sometimes grey and pathetic.

Now she sat in her own room, in the flat in Mayfair, and he was coming to see her. She was well again; just well enough to see him. But she was tired as she sat in the chair whilst her maid arranged her heavy, fair hair.

She knew she was a beauty, she knew it was expected of her that she should create an impression of modern beauty. And it pleased her, it made her soul rather hard and

## THE THIMBLE

proud: but also, at the bottom, it bored her. Still, she would have her hair built high in the fashionable mode, she would have it modelled to the whole form of her head, her figure. She lifted her eyes to look. They were slow, greenish, and cold like the sea at this moment, because she was so perplexed, so heavy with stying, all alone, always quite coldly alone, to understand, to understand and to adjust herself. It never occurred to her to expect anything of the other person: she was utterly self-responsible.

No! she said to her maid, in her slow, laconic, plangent voice, "don't let it swell out over the ears; lift it straight up; then twist it under - like that - so it goes clean from the side of the face. Do you see?"

And the maid went on with the hair-dressing; and she with her slow, cold musing. She was getting dressed now to see her bridegroom. The phrase, with its association in all the romances of the world, made her snigger involuntarily to herself. She was still like a schoolgirl, always seeing herself in her part. She got curious satisfaction from it, too. But also she was always humorously ironical when she found herself in these romantic situations. If brigands and robbers had carried her off, she would have played up to the event perfectly. In life, however, there was always a certain painful, laborious heaviness, a weight of self-responsibility. The event never carried her along a helpless protagonist. She was always responsible, in whatever situation. Now, this morning, her husband was coming to see her, and she was dressing to receive him. She felt heavy and inert as stone, yet inwardly trembling convulsively. The known man, he did not affect her. Heavy and inert in her soul, yet amused, she would play her part in his reception.

But the unknown man, what was he? Her dark, unknown soul trembled apprehensively.

At any rate he would be different. She shuddered. The vision she had of him, of the good-looking, clean, slightly tanned, attractive man, ordinary and yet with odd streaks of understanding that made her ponder, this she must put away. They said his face was rather horribly cut up. She shivered. How she hated it, coldly hated and loathed it, the thought of disfigurement. Her fingers trembled, she rose to go downstairs. If he came he must not come into her bedroom.

So, in her fashionable but inexpensive black silk dress, wearing her jewels, her string of opals, her big, ruby brooch, she went downstairs. She knew how to walk, how to hold her body according to the mode. She did it almost instinctively, so deep was her consciousness of the impression her own appearance must create.

Entering the small drawing-room she lifted her eyes slowly and looked at herself: a tall, loose woman in black, with fair hair raised up, and with slow, greenish, cold eyes looking into the mirror. She turned away with a cold, pungent sort of satisfaction. She was aware also of the traces of weariness and illness and age, in her face. She was twenty-seven years old.

So she sat on the little sofa by the fire. The room she had made was satisfactory to her, with its neutral, brown-grey walls, its deep brown, plain, velvety carpet, and the old furniture done in worn rose brocade, which she had bought from Countess Ambersyth's sale. She looked at her own large feet, upon the rose-red Persian rug.

Then nervously, yet quite calm, almost static, she sat still to wait. It was one of the moments of deepest suffering and suspense which she had ever known. She did not want to think of his disfigurement, she did not want to have any preconception of it. Let it come upon her. And

the man, the unknown strange man who was coming now to take up his position over against her soul, her soul so naked and exposed from illness, the man to whose access her soul was to be delivered up! She could not bear it. Her face set pale, she began to lose her consciousness.

Then something whispered in her:

'If I am like this, I shall be quite impervious to him, quite oblivious of anything but the surface of him.' And an anxious sort of hope sent her hands down onto the sofa at her side, pressed upon the worn brocade, spread flat. And she remained in suspense.

But could she bear it, could she bear it? She was weak and ill in a sort of after-death. Now what was this that she must confront, this other being? Her hands began to move slowly backwards and forwards on the sofa bed, slowly, as if the friction of the silk gave her some ease.

She was unaware of what she was doing. She was always so calm, so self-contained, so static; she was much too stoically well-bred to allow these outward nervous agitations. But now she sat still in suspense in the silent drawing-room, where the fire flickered over the dark brown carpet and over the pale rose furniture and over the pale face and the black dress and the white, sliding hands of the woman, and her hands slid backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards like a pleading, a hope, a tension of madness.

Her right hand came to the end of the sofa and pressed a little into the crack, the meeting between the arm and the sofa bed. Her long white fingers pressed into the fissure, pressed and entered rhythmically, pressed and pressed further and further into the tight depths of the fissure, between the silken, firm upholstery of the old sofa, whilst her mind was in a trance of suspense, and the firelight flickered on the yellow chrysanthemums that stood in a jar in the window.

The working, slow, intent fingers pressed deeper and deeper in the fissure of the sofa, pressed and worked their way intently, to the bottom. It was the bottom. They were there, they made sure. Making sure, they worked all along, very gradually, along the tight depth of the fissure.

Then they touched a little extraneous object, and a consciousness awoke in the woman's mind. Was it something? She touched again. It was something hard and rough. The fingers began to ply upon it. How firmly it was embedded in the depths of the sofa-crack. It had a thin rim, like a ring, but it was not a ring. The fingers worked more insistently. What was this little hard object?

The fingers pressed determinedly, they moved the little object. They began to work it up to the light. It was coming, there was success. The woman's heart relaxed from its tension, now her aim was being achieved. Her long, strong, white fingers brought out the little find.

It was a thimble set with brilliants; it was an old, rather heavy thimble of tarnished gold, set round the base with little diamonds or rubies. Perhaps it was not gold, perhaps they were only paste.

She put it on her sewing finger. The brilliants sparkled in the firelight. She was pleased. It was a vulgar thing, a gold thimble with ordinary pin-head dents, and a belt of jewels around the base. It was large too, big enough for her. It must have been some woman's embroidery thimble, some bygone woman's, perhaps some Lady Ambersyth's. At any rate, it belonged to the days when women did stitching as a usual thing. But it was heavy, it would make one's hand ache.

She began to rub the gold with her handkerchief. There was an engraved monogram, an Earl's, and then Z, Z, and a date, 15 Oct., 1801. She was very pleased, trembling with the thought of the old romance. What did Z. stand



## THE THIMBLE

for? She thought of her acquaintances, and could only think of Zouche. But he was not an Earl. Who would give the gift of a gold thimble set with jewels, in the year 1801? Perhaps it was a man come home from the wars: there were wars then.

The maid noiselessly opened the door and saw her mistress sitting in the soft light of the winter day, polishing something with her handkerchief.

'Mr Hepburn has come, my lady.'

'Has he?' answered the laconic, slightly wounded voice of the woman.

She collected herself and rose. Her husband was coming through the doorway, past the maid. He came without hat or coat or gloves, like an inmate of the house. He was an inmate of the house.

'How do you do?' she said, with stoic, plangent helplessness. And she held out her hand.

'How are *you*?' he replied, rather mumbling, with a sort of muffled voice.

'All right now, thanks,' and she sat down again, her heart beating violently. She had not yet looked at his face. The muffled voice terrified her so much. It mumbled rather mouthlessly.

Abstractedly, she put the thimble on her middle finger, and continued to rub it with her handkerchief. The man sat in silence opposite, in an armchair. She was aware of his khaki trousers and his brown shoes. But she was intent on burnishing the thimble.

Her mind was in a trance, but as if she were on the point of waking, for the first time in her life, waking up.

'What are you doing? What have you got?' asked the mumbling, muffled voice. A pang went through her. She looked up at the mouth that produced the sound. It was broken in, the bottom teeth all gone, the side of the chin battered small, while a deep seam, a deep, horrible

groove ran right into the middle of the cheek. But the mouth was the worst, sunk in at the bottom, with half the lip cut away.

'It is treasure-trove,' answered the plangent, cold-sounding voice. And she held out the thimble.

He reached to take it. His hand was white, and it trembled. His nerves were broken. He took the thimble between his fingers.

She sat obsessed, as if his disfigurement were photographed upon her mind, as if she were some sensitive medium to which the thing had been transferred. There it was, her whole consciousness was photographed into an image of his disfigurement, the dreadful sunken mouth that was not a mouth, which mumbled in talking to her, in a disfigurement of speech.

It was all accident, accident had taken possession of her very being. All she was, was purely accidental. It was like a sleep, a thin, taut, overfilming sleep in which the wakefulness struggles like a thing as yet unborn. She was sick in the thin, transparent membrane of her sleep, her overlying dream-consciousness, something actual but too unreal.

'How treasure-trove?' he mumbled. She could not understand.

She felt his moment's hesitation before he tried again, and a hot pain pierced through her, the pain of his maimed, crippled effort.

'Treasure-trove, you said,' he repeated, with a sickening struggle to speak distinctly.

Her mind hovered, then grasped, then caught the threads of the conversation.

'I found it,' she said. Her voice was clear and vibrating as bronze, but cold. 'I found it just before you came in.'

There was a silence. She was aware of the purely accidental condition of her whole being. She was framed

and constructed of accident, accidental association. It was like being made up of dream-stuff, without sequence or adherence to any plan or purpose. Yet within the imprisoning film of the dream was herself, struggling unborn, struggling to come to life.

It was difficult to break the inert silence that had succeeded between them. She was afraid it would go on for ever. With a strange, convulsive struggle, she broke into communication with him.

'I found it here, in the sofa,' she said, and she lifted her eyes for the first time to him.

His forehead was white, and his hair brushed smooth, like a sick man's. And his eyes were like the eyes of a child that has been ill, blue and abstract, as if they only listened from a long way off, and did not see any more. So far-off he looked, like a child that belongs almost more to death than to life. And her soul divined that he was waiting vaguely where the dark and the light divide, whether he should come in to life, or hesitate, and pass back.

She lowered her eyelids, and for a second she sat erect like a mask, with closed eyes, while a spasm of pure unconsciousness passed over her. It departed again, and she opened her eyes. She was awake.

She looked at him. His eyes were still abstract and without answer, changing only to the dream-psychology of his being. She contracted as if she were cold and afraid. They lit up now with a superficial over-flicker of interest.

'Did you really? Why, how did it come there?'

It was the same voice, the same stupid interest in accidental things, the same man as before. Only the enunciation of the words was all mumbled and muffled, as if the speech itself were disintegrating.

Her heart shrank, to close again like an over-sensitive

newborn thing, that is not yet strong enough in its own being. Yet once more she lifted her eyes, and looked at him.

He was flickering with his old, easily roused, spurious interest in the accidents of life. The film of separateness seemed to be coming over her. Yet his white forehead was somewhat deathly, with its smoothly brushed hair. He was like one dead. He was within the realm of death. His over-flicker of interest was only extraneous.

'I suppose it had got pushed down by accident,' she said, answering from her mechanical mind.

But her eyes were watching him who was dead, who was there like Lazarus before her, as yet unrisen.

'How did it happen?' she said, and her voice was changed, penetrating with sadness and approach. He knew what she meant.

'Well, you see I was knocked clean senseless, and that was all I knew for three days. But it seems that it was a shell fired by one of our own fellows, and it hit me because it was faultily made.'

Her face was very still as she watched.

'And how did you feel when you came round?'

'I felt pretty bad, as you can imagine; there was a crack on the skull as well as this on the jaw.'

'Did you think you were going to die?'

There was a long pause, whilst the man laughed self-consciously. But he laughed only with the upper part of his face: the maimed part remained still. And though the eyes seemed to laugh, just as of old, yet underneath them was a black, challenging darkness. She waited while this superficial smile of reserve passed away.

Then came the mumbling speech, simple, in confession.

'Yes, I lay and looked at it.'

The darkness of his eyes was now watching her, her soul was exposed and new-born. The triviality was gone,

the dream-psychology, the self-dependence. They were naked and new-born in soul, and depended on each other.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say: 'And why didn't you die?' But instead, her soul, weak and new-born, looked helplessly at him.

'I couldn't while you were alive,' he said.

'What?'

'Die.'

She seemed to pass away into unconsciousness. Then, as she came to, she said, as if in protest:

'What difference should I make to you! You can't live off me.'

He was watching her with unlighted, sightless eyes. There was a long silence. She was thinking, it was not her consciousness of him which had kept *her* alive. It was her own will.

'What did you hope for, from me?' she asked.

His eyes darkened, his face seemed very white, he really looked like a dead man as he sat silent and with open, sightless eyes. Between his slightly-trembling fingers was balanced the thimble, that sparkled sometimes in the fire-light. Watching him, a darkness seemed to come over her. She could not see, he was only a presence near her in the dark.

'We are both of us helpless,' she said, into the silence.

'Helpless for what?' answered his sightless voice.

'To live,' she said.

They seemed to be talking to each other's souls, their eyes and minds were sightless.

'We are helpless to live,' he repeated.

'Yes,' she said.

There was still a silence.

'I know,' he said, 'we are helpless to live. I knew that when I came round.'

'I am as helpless as you are,' she said.

'Yes,' came his slow, half-articulate voice. 'I know that. You're as helpless as I am.'

'Well then?'

'Well then, we are helpless. We are as helpless as babies,' he said.

'And how do you like being a helpless baby,' came the ironic voice.

'And how do *you* like being a helpless baby?' he replied.

There was a long pause. Then she laughed brokenly.

'I don't know,' she said. 'A helpless baby can't know whether it likes being a helpless baby.'

'That's just the same. But I feel *hope*, don't you?'

Again there was an unwilling pause on her part.

'Hope of what?'

'If I am a helpless baby now, that I shall grow into a man.'

She gave a slight, amused laugh.

'And I ought to hope that I shall grow into a woman,' she said.

'Yes, of course.'

'Then what am I now?' she asked, humorously.

'Now, you're a helpless baby, as you said.'

It piqued her slightly. Then again, she knew it was true.

'And what was I before - when I married you?' she asked, challenging.

'Why, then - I don't know what you were. I've had my head cracked and some dark let in, since then. So I don't know what you were. because it's all gone, don't you see.'

'I see.'

There was a pause. She became aware of the room about her, of the fire burning low and red.

'And what are we doing together?' she said.

'We're going to love each other,' he said.

'Didn't we love each other before?' challenged her voice.

'No, we couldn't. We weren't born.'

## THE THIMBLE

'Neither were we dead,' she answered.

He seemed struck.

'Are we dead now?' he asked in fear.

'Yes, we are.'

There was a suspense of anguish, it was so true.

'Then we must be born again,' he said.

'Must we?' said her deliberate, laconic voice.

'Yes, we must – otherwise –.' He did not finish.

'And do you think we've got the power to come to life again, now we're dead?' she asked.

'I think we have,' he said.

There was a long pause.

'Resurrection?' she said, almost as if mocking. They looked slowly and darkly into each other's eyes. He rose unthinking, went over and touched her hand.

'"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto the Father,"' she quoted, in her level, cold-sounding voice.

'No,' he answered; 'it takes time.'

The incongruous plainness of his statement made her jerk with laughter. At the same instant her face contracted and she said in a loud voice, as if her soul was being torn from her:

'Am I going to love you?'

Again he stretched forward and touched her hand, with the tips of his fingers. And the touch lay still, completed there.

Then at length he noticed that the thimble was stuck on his little finger. In the same instant she also looked at it.

'I want to throw it away,' he said.

Again she gave a little jerk of laughter.

He rose, went to the window, and raised the sash. Then, suddenly with a strong movement of the arm and shoulder, he threw the thimble out into the murky street. It bounded on the pavement opposite. Then a taxi-cab went by, and he could not see it any more.

## *The Mortal Coil*

SHE stood motionless in the middle of the room, something tense in her reckless bearing. Her gown of reddish stuff fell silkily about her feet; she looked tall and splendid in the candle-light. Her dark-blond hair was gathered loosely in a fold on top of her head, her young, blossom-fresh face was lifted. From her throat to her feet she was clothed in the elegantly-made dress of silky red stuff, the colour of red earth. She looked complete and lovely, only love could make her such a strange, complete blossom. Her cloak and hat were thrown across a table just in front of her.

Quite alone, abstracted, she stood there arrested in a conflict of emotions. Her hand, down against her skirt, worked irritably, the ball of the thumb rubbing, rubbing across the tips of the fingers. There was a slight tension between her lifted brows.

About her the room glowed softly, reflecting the candle-light from its whitewashed walls, and from the great, bowed, whitewashed ceiling. It was a large attic, with two windows, and the ceiling curving down on either side, so that both the far walls were low. Against one, on one side, was a single bed, opened for the night, the white overbolster piled back. Not far from this was the iron stove. Near the window closest to the bed was a table with writing materials, and a handsome cactus-plant with clear scarlet blossoms threw its bizarre shadow on the wall. There was another table near the second window, and opposite was the door on which hung a military cloak. Along the far wall, were guns and fishing-tackle, and



## THE MORTAL COIL

some clothes too, hung on pegs — all men's clothes, all military. It was evidently the room of a man, probably a young lieutenant.

The girl in her pure red dress that fell about her feet, so that she looked a woman not a girl, at last broke from her abstraction and went aimlessly to the writing-table. Her mouth was closed down stubbornly, perhaps in anger, perhaps in pain. She picked up a large seal made of agate, looked at the ingraven coat of arms, then stood rubbing her finger across the cut-out stone, time after time. At last she put the seal down, and looked at the other things — a beautiful old beer-mug used as a tobacco-jar, a silver box like an urn, old and of exquisite shape, a bowl of sealing wax. She fingered the pieces of wax. This, the dark-green, had sealed her last letter. Ah, well! She carelessly turned over the blotting book, which again had his arms stamped on the cover. Then she went away to the window. There, in the window-recess, she stood and looked out. She opened the casement and took a deep breath of the cold night air. Ah, it was good! Far below was the street, a vague golden milky way beneath her, its tiny black figures moving and crossing and recrossing with marionette, insect-like intentness. A small horse-car rumbled along the lines, so belittled, it was an absurdity. So much for the world! — he did not come.

She looked overhead. The stars were white and flashing, they looked nearer than the street, more kin to her, more real. She stood pressing her breast on her arms, her face lifted to the stars, in the long, anguished suspense of waiting. Noises came up small from the street, as from some insect-world. But the great stars overhead struck white and invincible, infallible. Her heart felt cold like the stars.

At last she started. There was a noisy knocking at the door, and a female voice calling:

'Anybody there?'

'Come in,' replied the girl.

She turned round, shrinking from this intrusion, unable to bear it, after the flashing stars.

There entered a thin, handsome dark girl dressed in an extravagantly-made gown of dark purple silk and dark blue velvet. She was followed by a small swarthy, inconspicuous lieutenant in pale-blue uniform.

'Ah *you!* . . . alone?' cried Teresa, the newcomer, advancing into the room. 'Where's the Fritz, then?'

The girl in red raised her shoulders in a shrug, and turned her face aside, but did not speak.

'Not here! You don't know where he is? Ach, the dummy, the lout!' Teresa swung round on her companion.

'Where is he?' she demanded.

He also lifted his shoulders in a shrug.

'He said he was coming in half an hour,' the young lieutenant replied.

'Ha! - half an hour! Looks like it! How long is that ago - two hours?'

Again the young man only shrugged. He had beautiful black eye-lashes, and steady eyes. He stood rather deprecatingly, while his girl, golden like a young panther, hung over him.

'One knows where he is,' said Teresa, going and sitting on the opened bed. A dangerous contraction came between the brows of Marta, the girl in red, at this act.

'Wine, Women and Cards!' said Teresa, in her loud voice. 'But they prefer the women on the cards.'

'“My love he has four Queenies,  
Four Queenies has my lo-o-ove”'

she sang. Then she broke off, and turned to Podewils. 'Was he winning when you left him, Karl?'

## THE MORTAL COIL

Again the young baron raised his shoulders.

'Tant pis que mal,' he replied, cryptically.

'Ah, *you!*' cried Teresa, 'with your *tant pis que mal!* Are *you* tant pis que mal?' She laughed her deep, strange laugh. 'Well,' she added, 'he'll be coming in with a fortune for you, Marta -'

There was a vague, unhappy silence.

'I know his fortunes,' said Marta.

'Yes,' said Teresa, in sudden sober irony, 'he's a horse-shoe round your neck, is that young jockey. - But what are you going to do, Matzen dearest? You're not going to wait for him any longer? - Don't dream of it! The idea, waiting for that young gentleman as if you were married to him! - Put your hat on, dearest, and come along with us . . . Where are we going, Karl, you pillar of salt? - Eh? - Geier's? - To Geier's, Marta, my dear. Come, quick, up - you've been martyred enough, Marta, my martyr - haw! - haw!! - put your hat on. Up - away!'

Teresa sprang up like an explosion, anxious to be off.

'No, I'll wait for him,' said Marta, sullenly.

'Don't be such a fool!' cried Teresa, in her deep voice. 'Wait for him! *I'd* give him wait for him. Catch this little bird waiting.' She lifted her hand and blew a little puff across the fingers. 'Choo-fly!' she sang, as if a bird had just flown.

The young lieutenant stood silent with smiling dark eyes. Teresa was quick, and golden as a panther.

'No, but really, Marta, you're not going to wait any more - really! It's stupid for you to play Gretchen - your eyes are much too green. Put your hat on, there's a darling.'

'No,' said Marta, her flower-like face strangely stubborn. 'I'll wait for him. He'll have to come some time.'

There was a moment's uneasy pause.

'Well,' said Teresa, holding her shoulders for her cloak,

‘so long as you don’t wait as long as Lenora-fuhr-ums-Morgenrot –! Adieu, my dear, God be with you.’

The young lieutenant bowed a solicitous bow, and the two went out, leaving the girl in red once more alone.

She went to the writing-table, and on a sheet of paper began writing her name in stiff Gothic characters, time after time:

Marta Hohenest

Marta Hohenest

Marta Hohenest.

The vague sounds from the street below continued. The wind was cold. She rose and shut the window. Then she sat down again.

At last the door opened, and a young officer entered. He was buttoned up in a dark-blue great-coat, with large silver buttons going down on either side of the breast. He entered quickly, glancing over the room, at Marta, as she sat with her back to him. She was marking with a pencil on paper. He closed the door. Then with fine beautiful movements he divested himself of his coat and went to hang it up. How well Marta knew the sound of his movements, the quick light step! But she continued mechanically making crosses on the paper, her head bent forward between the candles, so that her hair made fine threads and mist of light, very beautiful. He saw this, and it touched him. But he could not afford to be touched any further.

‘You have been waiting?’ he said formally. The insulting futile question! She made no sign, as if she had not heard. He was absorbed in the tragedy of himself, and hardly heeded her.

He was a slim, good-looking youth, clear-cut and delicate in mould. His features now were pale, there was something evasive in his dilated, vibrating eyes. He was

barely conscious of the girl, intoxicated with his own desperation, that held him mindless and distant.

To her, the atmosphere of the room was almost unbreathable, since he had come in. She felt terribly bound, walled up. She rose with a sudden movement that tore his nerves. She looked to him tall and bright and dangerous, as she faced round on him.

'Have you come back with a fortune?' she cried, in mockery, her eyes full of dangerous light.

He was unfastening his belt, to change his tunic. She watched him up and down, all the time. He could not answer, his lips seemed dumb. Besides, silence was his strength.

'Have you come back with a fortune?' she repeated, in her strong, clear voice of mockery.

'No,' he said, suddenly turning. 'Let it please you that—that I've come back at all.'

He spoke desperately, and tailed off into silence. He was a man doomed. She looked at him: he was insignificant in his doom. She turned in ridicule. And yet she was afraid; she loved him.

He had stood long enough exposed, in his helplessness. With difficulty he took a few steps, went and sat down at the writing-table. He looked to her like a dog with its tail between its legs.

He saw the paper, where her name was repeatedly written. She must find great satisfaction in her own name, he thought vaguely. Then he picked up the seal and kept twisting it round in his fingers, doing some little trick. And continually the seal fell on to the table with a sudden rattle that made Marta stiffen cruelly. He was quite oblivious of her.

She stood watching as he sat bent forward in his stupefaction. The fine cloth of his uniform showed the moulding of his back. And something tortured her as she

saw him, till she could hardly bear it: the desire of his finely-shaped body, the stupefaction and the abjectness of him now, his immersion in the tragedy of himself, his being unaware of her. All her will seemed to grip him, to bruise some manly nonchalance and attention out of him.

'I suppose you're in a fury with me, for being late?' he said, with impotent irony in his voice. Her fury over trifles, when he was lost in calamity! How great was his real misery, how trivial her small offendedness!

Something in his tone burned her, and made her soul go cold.

'I'm not exactly pleased,' she said coldly, turning away to a window.

Still he sat bent over the table, twisting something with his fingers. She glanced round on him. How nervy he was! He had beautiful hands, and the big topaz signet-ring on his finger made yellow lights. Ah, if only his hands were really dare-devil and reckless! They always seemed so guilty, so cowardly.

'I'm done for now,' he said suddenly, as if to himself, tilting back his chair a little. In all his physical movement he was so fine and poised, so sensitive! Oh, and it attracted her so much!

'Why?' she said, carelessly.

An anger burned in him. She was so flippant. If he were going to be shot, she would not be moved more than about half a pound of sweets.

'Why?' he repeated laconically. 'The same unimportant reason as ever.'

'Debts?' she cried, in contempt.

'Exactly.'

Her soul burned in anger.

'What have you done now? - lost more money?'

'Three thousand marks.'

She was silent in deep wrath.

THE MORTAL COIL

'More fool you!' she said. Then, in her anger, she was silent for some minutes. 'And so you're done for, for three thousand marks?' she exclaimed, jeering at him. 'You go pretty cheap.'

'Three thousand – and the rest,' he said, keeping up a manly *sang froid*.

'And the rest!' she repeated in contempt. 'And for three thousand – and the rest, your life is over!'

'My career,' he corrected her.

'Oh,' she mocked, 'only your career! I thought it was a matter of life and death. Only your career? Oh, only that!'

His eyes grew furious under her mockery.

'My career *is* my life,' he said.

'Oh, is it! – You're not a *man* then, you are only a career?'

'I am a gentleman.'

'Oh, are you! How amusing! How very amusing, to be a gentleman and not a man! – I suppose that's what it means, to be a gentleman, to have no guts outside your career?'

'Outside my honour – none.'

'And might I ask what *is* your honour?' She spoke in extreme irony.

'Yes, you may ask,' he replied coolly. 'But if you don't know without being told, I'm afraid I could never explain it.'

'Oh, you couldn't! No, I believe you – you are incapable of explaining it, it wouldn't bear explaining.' There was a long, tense pause. 'So you've made too many debts, and you're afraid they'll kick you out of the army, therefore your honour is gone, is it? – And what then – what after that?'

She spoke in extreme irony. He winced again at her phrase 'kick you out of the army'. But he tilted his chair back with assumed nonchalance.

'I've made too many debts, and I *know* they'll kick me out of the army,' he repeated, thrusting the thorn right home to the quick. 'After that – I can shoot myself. Or I might even be a waiter in a restaurant – or possibly a clerk, with twenty-five shillings a week.'

'Really! – All those alternatives! – Well, why not, why not be a waiter in the Germania? It might be awfully jolly.'

'Why not?' he repeated ironically. 'Because it wouldn't become me.'

She looked at him, at his aristocratic fineness of physique, his extreme physical sensitiveness. And all her German worship for his old, proud family rose up in her. No, he could not be a waiter in the Germania: she could not bear it. He was too refined and beautiful a thing.

'Ha!' she cried suddenly. 'It wouldn't come to that, either. If they kick you out of the army, you'll find somebody to get round – you're like a cat, you'll land on your feet.'

But this was just what he was not. He was not like a cat. His self-mistrust was too deep. Ultimately he had no belief in himself, as a separate isolated being. He knew he was sufficiently clever, an aristocrat, good-looking, the sensitive superior of most men. The trouble was, that apart from the social fabric he belonged to, he felt himself nothing, a cipher. He bitterly envied the common working-men for a certain manly aplomb, a grounded, almost stupid self-confidence he saw in them. Himself – he could lead such men through the gates of hell – for what did he care about danger or hurt to himself, while he was leading? But – cut him off from all this, and what was he? A palpitating rag of meaningless human life.

But she, coming from the people, could not fully understand. And it was best to leave her in the dark. The free indomitable self-sufficient being which a man must be in



his relation to a woman who loves him – this he could pretend. But he knew he was not it. He knew that the world of man from which he took his value was his mistress beyond any woman. He wished, secretly, crav-ingly, almost cravenly, in his heart, it was not so. But so it was.

Therefore, he heard her phrase ‘you’re like a cat,’ with some bitter envy.

‘Whom shall I get round? – some woman, who will marry me?’ he said.

This was a way out. And it was almost the inevitable thing, for him. But he felt it the last ruin of his manhood, even he.

The speech hurt her mortally, worse than death. She would rather he died, because then her own love would not turn to ash.

‘Get married, then, if you want to,’ she said, in a small broken voice.

‘Naturally,’ he said.

There was a long silence, a foretaste of barren hopelessness.

‘Why is it so terrible to you,’ she asked at length, ‘to come out of the army and trust to your own resources? Other men are strong enough.’

‘Other men are not me,’ he said.

Why would she torture him? She seemed to enjoy torturing him. The thought of his expulsion from the army was an agony to him, really worse than death. He saw himself in the despicable civilian clothes, engaged in some menial occupation. And he could not bear it. It was too heavy a cross.

Who was she to talk? She was herself, an actress, daughter of a tradesman. He was himself. How should one of them speak for the other? It was impossible. He loved her. He loved her far better than men usually loved their

mistresses. He really cared. – And he was strangely proud of his love for her, as if it were a distinction to him . . . But there was a limit to her understanding. There was a point beyond which she had nothing to do with him, and she had better leave him alone. Here in this crisis, which was *his* crisis, his downfall, she should not presume to talk, because she did not understand. – But she loved to torture him, that was the truth.

‘Why should it hurt you to work?’ she reiterated.

He lifted his face, white and tortured, his grey eyes flaring with fear and hate.

‘Work!’ he cried. ‘What do you think I am worth? – Twenty-five shillings a week, if I am lucky.’

His evident anguish penetrated her. She sat dumb-founded, looking at him with wide eyes. He was white with misery and fear; his hand, that lay loose on the table, was abandoned in nervous ignominy. Her mind filled with wonder, and with deep, cold dread. Did he really care so much? But did it *really* matter so much to him? When he said he was worth twenty-five shillings a week, he was like a man whose soul is pierced. He sat there, annihilated. She looked for him, and he was nothing then. She looked for the man, the free being that loved her. And he was not, he was gone, this blank figure remained. Something with a blanched face sat there in the chair, staring at nothing.

His amazement deepened with intolerable dread. It was as if the world had fallen away into chaos. Nothing remained. She seemed to grasp the air for foothold.

He sat staring in front of him, a dull numbness settled on his brain. He was watching the flame of the candle. And, in his detachment, he realized the flame was a swiftly travelling flood, flowing swiftly from the source of the wick through a white surge and on into the darkness above. It was like a fountain suddenly foaming out,

then running on dark and smooth. Could one dam the flood? He took a piece of paper, and cut off the flame for a second.

The girl in red started at the pulse of the light. She seemed to come to, from some trance. She saw his face, clear now, attentive, abstract, absolved. He was quite absolved from his temporal self.

'It isn't true,' she said, 'is it? It's not so tragic, really? - It's only your pride is hurt, your silly little pride?' She was rather pleading.

He looked at her with clear steady eyes.

'My pride!' he said. 'And isn't my pride *me*? What am I without my pride?'

'You are *yourself*,' she said. 'If they take your uniform off you, and turn you naked into the street, you are still *yourself*.'

His eyes grew hot. Then he cried:

'What does it mean, *myself*? It means I put on ready-made civilian clothes and do some dirty drudging elsewhere: that is what *myself* amounts to.'

She knitted her brows.

'But what you are *to me* - that naked self which you are to me - that is something, isn't it? - everything,' she said.

'What is it, if it means nothing?' he said: 'What is it, more than a pound of chocolate *dragées*? - It stands for nothing - unless as you say, a petty clerkship, at twenty-five shillings a week.'

These were all wounds to her, very deep. She looked in wonder for a few moments.

'And what does it stand for now?' she said. 'A magnificent second-lieutenant!'

He made a gesture of dismissal with his hand.

She looked at him from under lowered brows.

'And our love!' she said. 'It means nothing to you, nothing at all?'

'To me as a menial clerk, what does it mean? What does love mean! Does it mean that a man shall be no more than a dirty rag in the world? – What worth do you think I have in love, if in life I am a wretched inky subordinate clerk?'

'What does it matter?'

'It matters everything.'

There was silence for a time, then the anger flashed up in her.

'It doesn't matter to you what *I* feel, whether *I* care or not,' she cried, her voice rising. 'They'll take his little uniform with buttons off him, and he'll have to be a common little civilian, so all he can do is to shoot himself! – It doesn't matter that I'm there –'

He sat stubborn and silent. He thought her vulgar. And her raving did not alter the situation in the least.

'Don't you see what value you put on *me*, you clever little man?' she cried in fury. 'I've loved you, loved you with all my soul, for two years – and you've lied, and said you loved me. And now, what do I get? He'll shoot himself, because his tuppenny vanity is wounded. – Ah, *fool* –!'

He lifted his head and looked at her. His face was fixed and superior.

'All of which,' he said, 'leaves the facts of the case quite untouched!'

She hated his cool little speeches.

'Then shoot yourself,' she cried, 'and you'll be worth *less* than twenty-five shillings a week!'

There was a fatal silence.

'*Then* there'll be no question of worth,' he said.

'Ha!' she ejaculated in scorn.

She had finished. She had no more to say. At length, after they had both sat motionless and silent, separate, for some time, she rose and went across to her hat and cloak.

## THE MORTAL COIL

He shrank in apprehension. Now, he could not bear her to go. He shrank as if he were being whipped. She put her hat on, roughly, then swung her warm plaid cloak over her shoulders. Her hat was of black glossy silk, with a sheeny heap of cocksfeathers, her plaid cloak was dark green and blue, it swung open above her clear harsh-red dress. How beautiful she was, like a fiery Madonna!

'Good-bye,' she said, in her voice of mockery. 'I'm going now.'

He sat motionless, as if loaded with fetters. She hesitated, then moved towards the door.

Suddenly, with a spring like a cat, he was confronting her, his back to the door. His eyes were full and dilated, like a cat's, his face seemed to gleam at her. She quivered, as some subtle fluid ran through her nerves.

'Let me go,' she said dumbly. 'I've had enough.' His eyes, with a wide, dark electric pupil, like a cat's, only watched her objectively. And again a wave of female submissiveness went over her.

'I want to go,' she pleaded. 'You know it's no good. - You know this is no good.'

She stood humbly before him. A flexible little grin quivered round his mouth.

'You know you don't want me,' she persisted. 'You know you don't really want me. - You only do this to show your power over me - which is a mean trick.'

But he did not answer, only his eyes narrowed in a sensual, cruel smile. She shrank, afraid, and yet she was fascinated.

'You won't go yet,' he said.

She tried in vain to rouse her real opposition.

'I shall call out,' she threatened. 'I shall shame you before people.'

His eyes narrowed again in the smile of vindictive, mocking indifference.

'Call then,' he said.

And at the sound of his still, cat-like voice, an intoxication ran over her veins.

'I *will*,' she said, looking defiantly into his eyes. But the smile in the dark, full, dilated pupils made her waver into submission again.

'Won't you let me go?' she pleaded sullenly.

Now the smile went openly over his face.

'Take your hat off,' he said.

And with quick, light fingers he reached up and drew out the pins of her hat, unfastened the clasp of her cloak, and laid her things aside.

She sat down in a chair. Then she rose again, and went to the window. In the street below, the tiny figures were moving just the same. She opened the window, and leaned out, and wept.

He looked round at her in irritation as she stood in her long, clear-red dress in the window-recess, leaning out. She was exasperating.

'You will be cold,' he said.

She paid no heed. He guessed, by some tension in her attitude, that she was crying. It irritated him exceedingly, like a madness. After a few minutes of suspense, he went across to her, and took her by the arm. His hand was subtle, soft in its touch, and yet rather cruel than gentle.

'Come away,' he said. 'Don't stand there in the air - come away.'

He drew her slowly away to the bed, she sat down, and he beside her.

'What are you crying for?' he said in his strange, penetrating voice that had a vibration of exultancy in it. But her tears on his face ran faster.

He kissed her face, that was soft, and fresh, and yet warm, wet with tears. He kissed her again, and again, in the pleasure of the soft, wet saltiness of her. She turned aside

and wiped her face with her handkerchief, and blew her nose. He was disappointed – yet the way she blew her nose pleased him.

Suddenly she slid away to the floor, and hid her face in the side of the bed, weeping and crying loudly:

‘You don’t love me – Oh, you don’t love me – I thought you did, and you let me go on thinking it – but you don’t, no, you don’t, and I can’t bear it. – Oh, I can’t bear it.’

He sat and listened to the strange, animal sound of her crying. His eyes flickered with exultancy, his body seemed full and surcharged with power. But his brows were knitted in tension. He laid his hand softly on her head, softly touched her face, which was buried against the bed.

She suddenly rubbed her face against the sheets, and looked up once more.

‘You’ve deceived me,’ she said, as she sat beside him.

‘Have I? Then I’ve deceived myself.’ His body felt so charged with male vigour, he was almost laughing in his strength.

‘Yes,’ she said enigmatically, fatally. She seemed absorbed in her thoughts. Then her face quivered again.

‘And I loved you so much,’ she faltered, the tears rising. There was a clangor of delight in his heart.

‘I love *you*,’ he said softly, softly touching her, softly kissing her, in a sort of subtle, restrained ecstasy.

She shook her head stubbornly. She tried to draw away. Then she did break away, and turned to look at him, in fear and doubt. The little, fascinating, fiendish lights were hovering in his eyes like laughter.

‘Don’t hurt me so much,’ she faltered, in a last protest.

A faint smile came on his face. He took her face between his hands and covered it with soft, blinding kisses, like a soft, narcotic rain. He felt himself such an unbreakable fountain-head of powerful blood. He was trembling finely in all his limbs, with mastery.

When she lifted her face and opened her eyes, her face was wet, and her greenish-golden eyes were shining, it was like sudden sunshine in wet foliage. She smiled at him like a child of knowledge, through the tears, and softly, infinitely softly he dried her tears with his mouth and his soft young moustache.

'You'd never shoot yourself, because you're mine, aren't you!' she said, knowing the fine quivering of his body, in mastery.

'Yes,' he said.

'Quite mine?' she said, her voice rising in ecstasy.

'Yes.'

'Nobody else but mine – nothing at all –?'

'Nothing at all,' he re-echoed.

'But me?' came her last words of ecstasy.

'Yes.'

And she seemed to be released free into the infinite of ecstasy.

## 2

They slept in fulfilment through the long night. But then strange dreams began to fill them both, strange dreams that were neither waking nor sleeping; – only, in curious weariness, through her dreams, she heard at last a continual low rapping. She awoke with difficulty. The rapping began again – she started violently. It was at the door – it would be the orderly rapping for Friedeburg. Everything seemed wild and unearthly. She put her hand on the shoulder of the sleeping man, and pulled him roughly, waited a moment, then pushed him, almost violently, to awake him. He woke with a sense of resentment at her violent handling. Then he heard the knocking of the orderly. He gathered his senses.

'Yes, Heinrich!' he said.



'All right.'

'Kiss me.'

He bent down and kissed her.

And still her clear, rather frightening eyes seemed to be searching for him inside himself. He was like a bird transfixed by her pellucid, grey-green, wonderful eyes. She put her hands into his soft, thick, fine hair, and gripped her hands full of his hair. He wondered with fear at her sudden painful clutching.

'I shall be late,' he said.

'Yes,' she answered. And she let him go.

As he fastened his tunic he glanced out of the window. It was still night: a night that must have lasted since eternity. There was a moon in the sky. In the streets below the yellow street-lamps burned small at intervals. This was the night of eternity.

There came a knock at the door, and the orderly's voice.

'Coffee, Sir.'

'Leave it there.'

They heard the faint jingle of the tray as it was set down outside.

Friedeburg sat down to put on his boots. Then, with a man's solid tread, he went and took in the tray. He felt properly heavy and secure now in his accoutrement. But he was always aware of her two wonderful, clear, unfolded eyes, looking on his heart, out of her uncanny silence.

There was a strong smell of coffee in the room.

'Have some coffee?' His eyes could not meet hers.

'No, thank you.'

'Just a drop?'

'No, thank you.'

Her voice sounded quite gay. She watched him dipping his bread in the coffee and eating quickly, absently. He did

not know what he was doing, and yet the dipped bread and hot coffee gave him pleasure. He gulped down the remainder of his drink, and rose to his feet.

'I must go,' he said.

There was a curious, poignant smile in her eyes. Her eyes drew him to her. How beautiful she was, and dazzling, and frightening, with this look of brilliant tenderness seeming to glitter from her face. She drew his head down to her bosom, and held it fast prisoner there, murmuring with tender, triumphant delight: 'Dear! Dear!'

At last she let him lift his head, and he looked into her eyes, that seemed to concentrate in a dancing, golden point of vision in which he felt himself perish.

'Dear!' she murmured. 'You love me, don't you?'

'Yes,' he said mechanically.

The golden point of vision seemed to leap to him from her eyes, demanding something. He sat slackly, as if spell-bound. Her hand pushed him a little.

'Mustn't you go?' she said.

He rose. She watched him fastening the belt round his body, that seemed soft under the fine clothes. He pulled on his great-coat, and put on his peaked cap. He was again a young officer.

But he had forgotten his watch. It lay on the table near the bed. She watched him slinging it on his chain. He looked down at her. How beautiful she was, with her luminous face and her fine, stray hair! But he felt far away.

'Anything I can do for you?' he asked.

'No, thank you - I'll sleep,' she replied, smiling. And the strange golden spark danced on her eyes again, again he felt as if his heart were gone, destroyed out of him. There was a fine pathos too in her vivid, dangerous face.

He kissed her for the last time, saying:

'I'll blow the candles out, then?'

'Yes, my love – and I'll sleep.'

'Yes – sleep as long as you like.'

The golden spark of her eyes seemed to dance on him like a destruction, she was beautiful, and pathetic. He touched her tenderly with his finger-tips, then suddenly blew out the candles, and walked across in the faint moonlight to the door.

He was gone. She heard his boots click on the stone stairs – she heard the far below tread of his feet on the pavement. Then he was gone. She lay quite still, in a swoon of deathly peace. She never wanted to move any more. It was finished. She lay quite still, utterly, utterly abandoned.

But again she was disturbed. There was a little tap at the door, then Teresa's voice saying, with a shuddering sound because of the cold:

'Ugh! – I'm coming to you, Marta my dear. I can't stand being left alone.'

'I'll make a light,' said Marta, sitting up and reaching for the candle. 'Lock the door, will you, Resie, and then nobody can bother us.'

She saw Teresa, loosely wrapped in her cloak, two thick ropes of hair hanging untidily. Teresa looked voluptuously sleepy and easy, like a cat running home to the warmth.

'Ugh!' she said, 'it's cold!'

And she ran to the stove. Marta heard the chink of the little shovel, a stirring of coals, then a clink of the iron door. Then Teresa came running to the bed, with a shuddering little run, she puffed out the light and slid in beside her friend.

'So cold!' she said, with a delicious shudder at the warmth. Marta made place for her, and they settled down.

'Aren't you glad you're not them?' said Resie, with a little shudder at the thought. 'Ugh! – poor devils!'

## THE MORTAL COIL

'I am,' said Marta.

'Ah, sleep – sleep, how lovely!' said Teresa, with deep content. 'Ah, it's so good!'

'Yes,' said Marta.

'Good morning, good night, my dear,' said Teresa, already sleepily.

'Good night,' responded Marta.

Her mind flickered a little. Then she sank unconsciously to sleep. The room was silent.

Outside, the setting moon made peaked shadows of the high-roofed houses; from twin towers that stood like two dark, companion giants in the sky, the hour trembled out over the sleeping town. But the footsteps of hastening officers and cowering soldiers rang on the frozen pavements. Then a lantern appeared in the distance, accompanied by the rattle of a bullock wagon. By the light of the lantern on the wagon-pole could be seen the delicately moving feet and the pale, swinging dewlaps of the oxen. They drew slowly on, with a rattle of heavy wheels, the banded heads of the slow beasts swung rhythmically.

Ah, this was life! How sweet, sweet each tiny incident was! How sweet to Friedeburg, to give his orders ringingly on the frosty air, to see his men like bears shambling and shuffling into their places, with little dancing movements of uncouth playfulness and resentment, because of the pure cold.

Sweet, sweet it was to be marching beside his men, sweet to hear the great thresh-thresh of their heavy boots in the unblemished silence, sweet to feel the immense mass of living bodies co-ordinated into oneness near him, to catch the hot waft of their closeness, their breathing. Friedeburg was like a man condemned to die, catching at every impression as at an inestimable treasure.

Sweet it was to pass through the gates of the town, the scanty, loose suburb, into the open darkness and space of

the country. This was almost best of all. It was like emerging in the open plains of eternal freedom.

They saw a dark figure hobbling along under the dark side of a shed. As they passed, through the open door of the shed, in the golden light were seen the low rafters, the pale, silken sides of the cows, evanescent. And a woman with a red kerchief bound round her head lifted her face from the flank of the beast she was milking, to look at the soldiers threshing like multitudes of heavy ghosts down the darkness. Some of the men called to her, cheerfully, impudently. Ah, the miraculous beauty and sweetness of the merest trifles like these!

They tramped on down a frozen, rutty road, under lines of bare trees. Beautiful trees! Beautiful frozen ruts in the road! Ah, even, in one of the ruts there was a silver of ice and of moon-glimpse. He heard ice tinkle as a passing soldier purposely put his toe in it. What a sweet noise!

But there was a vague uneasiness. He heard the men arguing as to whether dawn were coming. There was the silver moon, still riding on the high seas of the sky. A lovely thing she was, a jewel! But was there any blemish of day? He shrank a little from the rawness of the day to come. This night of morning was so rare and free.

Yes, he was sure. He saw a colourless paleness on the horizon. The earth began to look hard, like a great, concrete shadow. He shrank into himself. Glancing at the ranks of his men, he could see them like a company of rhythmic ghosts. The pallor was actually reflected on their livid faces. This was the coming day! It frightened him.

The dawn came. He saw the rosiness of it hang trembling with light, above the east. Then a strange glamour of scarlet passed over the land. At his feet, glints of ice flashed scarlet, even the hands of the men were red as they swung, sinister, heavy, reddened.

The sun surged up, her rim appeared, swimming with

fire, hesitating, surging up. Suddenly there were shadows from trees and ruts, and grass was hoar and ice was gold against the ebony shadow. The faces of the men were alight, kindled with life. Ah, it was magical, it was all too marvellous! If only it were always like this!

When they stopped at the inn for breakfast, at nine o'clock, the smell of the inn went raw and ugly to his heart: beer and yesterday's tobacco!

He went to the door to look at the men biting huge bites from their hunks of grey bread, or cutting off pieces with their clasp-knives. This made him still happy. Women were going to the fountain for water, the soldiers were chaffing them coarsely. He liked all this.

But the magic was going, inevitably, the crystal delight was thawing to desolation in his heart, his heart was cold, cold mud. Ah, it was awful. His face contracted, he almost wept with cold, stark despair.

Still he had the work, the day's hard activity with the men. While this lasted, he could live. But when this was over, and he had to face the horror of his own cold-thawing mud of despair: ah, it was not to be thought of. Still, he was happy at work with the men: the wild desolate place, the hard activity of mock warfare. Would to God it were real: war, with the prize of death!

By afternoon the sky had gone one dead, livid level of grey. It seemed low down, and oppressive. He was tired, the men were tired, and this let the heavy cold soak in to them like despair. Life could not keep it out.

And now, when his heart was so heavy it could sink no more, he must glance at his own situation again. He must remember what a fool he was, his new debts like half thawed mud in his heart. He knew, with the cold misery of hopelessness, that he would be turned out of the army. What then? – what then but death? After all, death was the solution for him. Let it be so.

They marched on and on, stumbling with fatigue under a great leaden sky, over a frozen dead country. The men were silent with weariness, the heavy motion of their marching was like an oppression. Friedeburg was tired too, and deadened, as his face was deadened by the cold air. He did not think any more; the misery of his soul was like a frost inside him.

He heard someone say it was going to snow. But the words had no meaning for him. He marched as a clock ticks, with the same monotony, everything numb and cold-soddened.

They were drawing near to the town. In the gloom of the afternoon he felt it ahead, as unbearable oppression on him. Ah the hideous suburb! What was his life, how did it come to pass that life was lived in a formless, hideous grey structure of hell! What did it all mean? Pale, sulphur-yellow lights spotted the livid air, and people, like soddened shadows, passed in front of the shops that were lit up ghastly in the early twilight. Out of the colourless space, crumbs of snow came and bounced animatedly off the breast of his coat.

At length he turned away home, to his room, to change and get warm and renewed, for he felt as cold-soddened as the grey, cold, heavy bread which felt hostile in the mouths of the soldiers. His life was to him like this dead, cold bread in his mouth.

As he neared his own house, the snow was peppering thinly down. He became aware of some unusual stir about the house-door. He looked – a strange, closed-in wagon, people, police. The sword of Damocles that had hung over his heart, fell. O God, a new shame, some new shame, some new torture! His body moved on. So it would move on through misery upon misery, as is our fate. There was no emergence, only this progress through misery unto misery, till the end. Strange, that human life was so

tenacious! Strange, that men had made of life a long slow process of torture to the soul. Strange, that it was no other than this! Strange, that but for man, this misery would not exist. For it was not God's misery, but the misery of the world of man.

He saw two officials push something white and heavy into the cart, shut the doors behind with a bang, turn the silver handle, and run round to the front of the wagon. It moved off. But still most of the people lingered. Friedeburg drifted near in that inevitable motion which carries us through all our shame and torture. He knew the people talked about him. He went up the steps and into the square hall.

There stood a police-officer, with a note-book in his hand, talking to Herr Kapell, the housemaster. As Friedeburg entered through the swing door, the housemaster, whose brow was wrinkled in anxiety and perturbation, made a gesture with his hand, as if to point out a criminal.

'Ah! — the Herr Baron von Friedeburg!' he said, in self-exculpation.

The police officer turned, saluted politely, and said, with the polite, intolerable *suffisance* of officialdom:

'Good evening! Trouble here!'

'Yes?' said Friedeburg.

He was so frightened, his sensitive constitution was so lacerated, that something broke in him, he was a subservient, murmuring ruin.

'Two young ladies found dead in your room,' said the police-official, making an official statement. But under his cold impartiality of officialdom, what obscene unction! Ah, what obscene exposures now!

'Dead!' ejaculated Friedeburg, with the wide eyes of a child. He became quite child-like, the official had him completely in his power. He could torture him as much as he liked.



‘Yes.’ He referred to his note-book. ‘Asphyxiated by fumes from the stove.’

Friedeburg could only stand wide-eyed and meaningless.

‘Please – will you go upstairs?’

The police-official marshalled Friedeburg in front of himself. The youth slowly mounted the stairs, feeling as if transfixed through the base of the spine, as if he would lose the use of his legs. The official followed close on his heels.

They reached the bedroom. The policeman unlocked the door. The housekeeper followed with a lamp. Then the official examination began.

‘A young lady slept here last night?’

‘Yes.’

‘Name, please?’

‘Marta Hohenest.’

‘H-o-h-e-n-e-s-t,’ spelled the official. ‘– And address?’

Friedeburg continued to answer. This was the end of him. The quick of him was pierced and killed. The living dead answered the living dead in obscene antiphony. Question and answer continued, the note-book worked as the hand of the old dead wrote in it the replies of the young who was dead.

The room was unchanged from the night before. There was her heap of clothing, the lustrous, pure-red dress lying soft where she had carelessly dropped it. Even, on the edge of the chair-back, her crimson silk garters hung looped.

But do not look, do not see. It is the business of the dead to bury their dead. Let the young dead bury their own dead, as the old dead have buried theirs. How can the dead remember, they being dead? Only the living can remember, and are at peace with their living who have passed away.